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"Harriet and the Piper," "The Beloved Woman," "Certain People of Importance," "Lucretia Lombard," etc.

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TO CLARISSA, WITH A BOOK

Clarissa dear, ours is the heritage
  Of the great loves that blaze the trail before us—
Our grandsires, our great grandsires set the stage,
  Their love, remembered, is our Grecian Chorus.

Hawaii, California, and New York,
  These were the settings for the friendly story
That still we write, in hours of play and work,
  In bitter hours, in glad, in grief and glory.

Now towards The Happy End our roadways move,
  But our sons' sons,—and theirs,—shall make more certain
Another hundred years of locking love,—
  A thousand years before the final curtain!

BUTTERFLY

CHAPTER I

THE dark November afternoon shut down upon the trampled and packed snow of the streets at about four o'clock; lights began to show pinkish and yellowish in the windows of village shops, and such motor-cars as were moving upon the ice and slush that surrounded the car-tracks in great pools and wallows showed wavering and moving lights in the twilight, as well. At the curbs, on both sides, mud-spattered cars were standing at irregular angles; there was a gush of light from the side door of the grocery, a covered truck was backed against the sidewalk, and young men in heavy sweaters, with red, chapped big hands, were hustling clean pine boxes and cardboard cartons to and fro.

In the shabby private office of John Spaulding, president of the Spaulding Brothers Packing Company of Mount Holly, Hilary Collier, his secretary, was standing idly at the window, her eyes absently fixed upon the familiar bustle of a late winter afternoon in the street, her thoughts, as usual, many miles away. She had spent most of her twenty-three years in the little town; she liked it, but she never seemed to herself to belong here. Beyond Burlington, beyond Camden, lay the great world, and Hilary knew that her destiny, as

her mother's before her, lay somewhere out there in the unknown.

Meanwhile, she was content. The years had been very kind to her since that other November day when, in her sixteenth year, newly fatherless, frightened and doubtful, she had come to old John Spaulding with a half-trembling and half-dignified plea for work—any kind of work. She had had only a few thousands in the world; and there was Dora! Dora was only eleven years old; Dora must be educated for the great destiny ahead of her.

John Spaulding had not realized then exactly what a treasure stood before him in this eager, untrained girl. But he had known at once that he could use Miss Collier somewhere and somehow; she was not the usual type of work-seeking woman in any way.

So Hilary, shaking and anxious to please, came into the packing rooms as checker, made friends, was promoted, acted in this capacity and that cheerfully, always successful and always climbing, until finally she found herself here, in this shabby, stove-heated office that was yet the holy of holies, the vice-president's own sanctum; found herself his friend, his wife's friend, popular among all her fellow employees, and—miracle of miracles!—able to take care of herself and Dora with none of those racking periods of misgiving and strain that she had feared would mark the opening years of her business career.

It did not seem to her the achievement that it might have seemed to many a girl of her age, because so much greater achievement lay still ahead. This was but the first step; the hardest, perhaps, in the sense of being

the dullest and slowest, but by no means the bravest or most daring. The next step, sketched to her seven years ago, in her father's fading and difficult voice as he lay dying, was by far more important.

"When Dora is eighteen or twenty. . . ," Bronson Collier had whispered, "you must get away then, Hilary. She'll have had all her groundwork by that time . . . she'll have her wings . . . take her where they can teach her to fly!"

The echo of the passionate, anxious words had been Hilary's creed for all these seven years. Dora must have her groundwork; she must grow into girlhood, strong and well, she must write a gentlewoman's pretty letter, she must read French and German, know something of history and art. And of music she must know much, work not only with her mother's violin, but with the piano, with counterpoint and orchestration, with every history of music that Hilary's loyal eagerness could find for her in the old catalogues and lists of the world. For to Dora had descended the genius that had made her beautiful French mother known, at twenty, as one of the *violinistes* of her day. "Sabine Charpentier" was only a memory, vague and sweet, to her little daughter Dora, but Hilary remembered their mother well, and she felt herself the torch-bearer between the gifted mother and the gifted child.

How their father, a dreamy, impractical, despondent putterer in the world of music, had ever won Sabine from the brilliant opening of her career, was always a mystery to Hilary. Bronson Collier was a Bostonian, stranded in Munich, when they met. He had been discontentedly

and desultorily connected with various orchestras there as pianist; he was the possessor of considerable musical knowledge, and some technical skill, but warmth and magnetism were lacking in his work as in his nature.

Why the gentle, enthusiastic, lovely Sabine loved him perhaps she herself never could say. For his sake she abandoned her art, there was a quiet wedding, there were some years of unsuccessful work abroad, and then they returned to America, where they tried to teach, Bronson darkly gloomy with his piano pupils, his girlish wife distressed and uncertain in her dealing with the few who came to her for work with the violin. In Philadelphia they starved: they moved a few miles away, to Mount Holly.

Meanwhile children came; first the sturdy and spirited Hilary, who seemed to both mother and father a miracle of beauty and charm; and then, four years later, a son. The boy was always delicate, needing care, and causing them an infinite anxiety even in the midst of troubled and uncertain financial prospects. These two were born in France; Dora came when Hilary was five and Bronson two years old; came to dreary little cramped rooms in Philadelphia, where the family struggle for existence was complicated by the bitter winter weather and by her brother's rapidly failing health.

There was an epidemic of baby sicknesses that year; presently the Colliers left the cruel big city and the little grave of their only son behind them, and took the dancing Hilary and the staring baby into the friendlier atmosphere of the little New Jersey village. But some of the bitter cold of that terrible winter had crept into the mother's heart, never to melt or thaw again.

The woman who had been Sabine Charpentier ten years ago lay quietly on a couch in the dim little parlour of the Mount Holly house; sometimes her white hands reached for the beloved, slim dark body of the Amati, but for the most part she made no effort, merely watching the other lives about her with dim and smiling eyes. Bronson put on his old greenish coat and went off to his pupils, old Mrs. Poett clattered pans in the kitchen, the baby wakened, whimpered, crowed, and fell asleep again, and Hilary, the one glowing, hopeful thing in her mother's life, came and went with the joyous racket of healthy childhood.

Hilary brought her mother April violets and the year's first plume of delicate lilac bloom. Hilary practised dutifully at the old square piano; her clever little fingers rippled through Schubert's dances and Chopin's études; when she was ten years old she composed for her mother a little étude of her own. Sabine's white face was wet with tears as she embraced the little musician passionately; Bronson wasted a few of his precious dollars in having the music published.

And then, slow of growth, but bursting upon them with all the sudden glory of a miracle, came the wonderful thing that was to influence all of Hilary's life and send her mother, and, when his turn came, her father, contentedly enough into the life beyond. This was Dora.

Dora had always been a beautiful child, obedient, winning, full of enchanting animation and vivacity, and she had shown an odd interest in music even in her baby days. Her mother had said of the baby, at eleven months, that she would finish any theme from the "Ring"

if someone began it for her. Dora lisped in musical terms, and to Sabine's hummed nursery airs Dora supplied a wavering alto at two years. She called the notes of the piano various colours; long before most children know colours at all, Dora was calling C blue, and G orange; she never confused them. She played little duets with Hilary when she was not quite four, and one day Bronson, giving a lesson, discovered to his amazement that the baby could name every note in the scale with her eyes shut. Sabine listened to her youngest-born tenderly, almost reverently, when Dora, in imperfect baby chatter, explained that some of the notes were like velvet, and some like satin, and that the deep bass notes were like the heavy black fur on Father's old coat collar.

Long before this the child had picked up her mother's violin, struggling patiently and intelligently toward harmony with the awkward big bow and the difficult strings. At four she stood graceful and erect before the little audience of three, her mane of fair straight hair falling upon her slender shoulders, her brown eyes serious, her lips twitching as do the lips of the great violinists when the beloved instrument is held close between cheek and shoulder. The baby fingers moved quickly and nervously, with that spider-like strength and precision that never come to many a patient worker, but that had been born in the little hand of Dora Collier.

Sabine was dying then, and knew it; but from that hour she was resigned to die. The genius that had been hers lived again in this child that was dearer than her own life; it remained now but to cherish and feed the sacred flame.

She consigned her child to Bronson, and for the re-

maining years of his life, only seven years, after all, he was passionately loyal to her trust. He watched and guarded and guided the child's developing gift, and Hilary watched and guarded them both. The very definiteness and energy of her father's absorption in Dora brought him a sort of prosperity at the end; everyone knew of the little Collier girl and her extraordinary promise, and there was a general tendency to forgive her father his oddities and appreciate his musical thoroughness and fervour at last. Pupils came to the little brick house, if only to have the youthful prodigy, with her mane of hair and her famous violin, introduced when the lesson was done; Bronson actually gave a recital or two of his pupils, with Dora for his star. And nothing, on these occasions, could have been more affecting, if there had been eyes to see it, which there were not, than the older daughter and sister, with her tremulous excitement and admiration for her gifted family.

Dora was eleven years old when Bronson suddenly died. He died with Hilary, who was sixteen, kneeling beside him and promising, with a stern gravity infinitely more moving than tears would have been, that she would take care of Dora. Dora was to be educated, to be trained, to be taken abroad to the best of teachers.

"There's Kronski," he said, suddenly, on the very last night of his life. "Konrad Kronski . . . he's only a boy, but they say he's the coming violinist. Your mother knew his mother, they lived in the same family, she was with her when he was born. Take Dora to him, ask his advice. He'll teach her, or he'll tell you . . . you'll find letters his mother wrote us, when we first were married, in one of the chests. But she must be

great, Hilary, she must be what we never were . . . you can make her great!"

No misgiving as to the possible fairness of this demand, made of a mere girl, ever troubled Bronson. Hilary's was one of those vital and vivid natures that never dreamed of self-pity. There were in her such a wellspring of energy and self-reliance, such a keen delight in mere living, that she might almost have been said to welcome any loss and any misfortune that gave her a chance to prove her own splendid powers.

She did grieve for her father, heartily and with many a burst of refreshing tears. But she was too busy to grieve long, too deeply absorbed in the fascinating business of managing her own affairs. She had her memories, the household of books and music that her marvellous father and mother had left behind them, and Dora. The eyes of the entire village, sympathetic, admiring, curious, were upon the two little sisters. Hilary felt that she had no choice, she must rise to the demand of life.

Standing here, in John Spaulding's office, seven years later, Hilary smiled, remembering all this. Poor little courageous fool of a girl of sixteen, how gallantly she had ridden at her windmills! Many a discouraged hour, and weary hour, and hour of humiliation and doubt, lay between that day and this. She was wiser now, less blindly bold, not quite so dramatically confident as that younger Hilary had been.

Dora was eighteen now, with all the musical promise of her astonishing babyhood fulfilled, and Hilary, looking down the street, dimming in the bleak winter

twilight, could see the still lighted windows of the bank, where the money that was to take Dora and herself to Europe next year, was safely waiting.

And finally, to set this train of reminiscent thought in motion, her eyes had only to move in a certain direction, to find the picture of a young man, boldly displayed upon a poster in the darkening street: a young man who was represented with a violin upon his shoulder. Under him, in large clear print, were the words: "Konrad Kronski. First Appearance in America. Philadelphia, Evening of December Third."

Hilary had watched some men pasting the poster on the fence an hour ago. She had never seen Kronski, she had not known until then that he was in America. But a letter, written to him, was in her hand at this moment, ready for the post.

That was the way with her life, she reflected, almost awestruck with gratitude for the suddenly vouchsafed guidance, as she turned back into the dusky office, touched the light, and went to sit down again at her desk. She had been wondering for months how the next great change was to come about. Were she and Dora simply to pack up their clothes, and rent the house, and go away into the unknown? Was that safe?

Dora was fast developing; young men were beginning to admire her. The girl was restless, too, discontented and vaguely dissatisfied—Hilary knew that temperament well! The struggle to keep their lives apart from the lives of the village, to keep their great and sacred end always in sight, had been growing increasingly difficult for the older sister. Dora could not always

seem to realize, as Hilary did, that theirs was a great destiny. Dora wanted to go to parties, to wear pretty frocks, to have good times. Hilary knew that the time was coming, and coming fast, when she must act, or fail.

And now, like a guiding star in the east, had come this man's name out of her past, the name her father had mentioned with his dying breath. She was to take Dora to Kronski—Kronski would advise them! And time had brought Kronski into her reach.

To-night she would look through old letters, find what she could in his mother's writing to her mother, and make sure her claim, so that when she saw him, as she intended to see him, she would know exactly how to reach him. The letter she had written him told him of the old friendship, told him that she and Dora would be at the concert, asked him if they might bring the Amati, and if after the concert he would listen to Dora. And with this opening of the heavens Hilary felt a rush of confidence and delight sweep over her. She had come to work this morning somewhat worried and puzzled; now all was clear. Kronski could not but be impressed by her exquisite "Butterfly," as she almost always called her little sister; perhaps he had a kind wife, perhaps they would all go back to Europe together——!

An unseen door slammed; she went into the outer office expectantly. John Spaulding's nephew was expected to-night from New York; he was to spend some time in Mount Holly with his uncle and aunt. She knew him to be a great favourite with his uncle, as indeed with everyone. Echoes of his business ability came

from the New York office; and hints of his social successes Dora sometimes found in the daily papers or the illustrated weeklies. He had earned a captain's commission early in the war, and had acquitted himself creditably in France. To Hilary, as to everyone else in the Spaulding factory, he seemed one of the most important persons in the world.

Hilary had seen him several years ago, when she was a humble little filing clerk, and he a handsome serious youth of twenty-five, walking through the packing plant between his father and uncle, his groomed appearance, his well-cut homespun clothes, and his ready, clear voice in striking contrast to the busy young men and women who watched him silently from above their cutting tables, packing machines, and ledgers. He met their eyes with a friendly, interested look from his own wide-open gray ones; he was of not more than the average height, squarely built, with thick, close-cropped light-brown hair. They all knew that his father was Rodney Spaulding, the head of the firm, and that this boy would inherit the lion's share of both the New York and the New Jersey plants some day. Old John Spaulding had two daughters, both with wealthy husbands: it was inevitable that young Craig Spaulding should succeed to both his father's and uncle's control and management of the business.

Uncle and nephew came together into the office; Hilary stood up for an introduction. Craig Spaulding was just as she remembered him, a little older, a little sterner, perhaps, but very much the poised and courteous gentleman. His voice, and his quick finished speech, were delightful. His eyes were keen, but full of an

engaging friendliness that disarmed resentment; his clothes, even this village girl could see, were perfection. The big, dark-red coat was belted, the big gloves were a greenish yellow, the hat had at the back a small flat bow that Hilary had never seen on any other man's hat, and was tilted at an angle an inch or two more daring.

Craig saw, against a background of ink-spattered letter-files and bundles of old papers, the harsh electric lights falling full upon her, a graceful, well-built girl whose face was oddly and inexplicably bright. Her hair, clinging close to her head in rich waves and heavy braids, was reddish brown, her eyes were a clear surprising blue, and she had an unexpected mouth, a mouth that looked rather wide and grave when she was serious but that had a great and irregular charm when she smiled. She wore what she had worn almost as a uniform for three or four years, but he did not know that. He did not even analyze the simple frock of dark blue corduroy velvet, with the plain collar of dark, creamy lace, but he thought that he liked her and her dress; there was something quaint and honest and interesting about them both.

"You've met my nephew before?" said John Spaulding, his face rosy with cold air and exercise, his frosty old blue eye kindly. "Sorry to keep you here, but the train was late, and then we had to go up to the house to see the boy's aunt. I think it's a little late to go over things to-night; suppose we put it off until to-morrow?"

Hilary looked at him respectfully, deferentially.

"Just as you decide, Mr. Spaulding."

"Boys have pretty well gone home, haven't they?"

"I imagine so." Hilary glanced at her wrist-watch. "It's just five," she said.

A shrill whistle, outside in the gloom of the yard, confirmed her. Young Spaulding and his uncle and Hilary looked out of the side window. It gave upon a large yard bounded by various sheds and doorways; upon these and upon the churned black mud underfoot several bright lights were shining. The doorway of one long building opened, and the employees began to stream out in groups of twos and threes, punching a time-clock as they came. The young men and women were well but shabbily wrapped; they laughed and locked arms companionably as they picked their way toward the gate.

"That whistle is the signal for tea-pots to be filled all along Spaulding Street!" the old president of the plant said in genial satisfaction.

"I like to see them come out like that," Hilary said somewhat timidly. "It reminds me of something. I don't know what!" She spoke mildly, merely trying to be polite, to show the great Craig that pleasant relationships existed between his uncle and his uncle's secretary. For however justly and however staunchly Hilary might feel, elsewhere, the importance of her work in life, and its utter independence of a place as obscure as Mount Holly, here in the factory the Spauldings were the natural rulers of the universe.

"Of what?" Craig Spaulding asked, with his accurate, sharp, and yet kindly manner.

"Well," she stammered, a little startled, "I was thinking of—of Russia, and of some place, in England,

I imagine—where the lights, and the wet, dark yard, and the people streaming along, were like that!"

"You know Russia?" Craig asked, crisply.

"I remember Moscow, when I was five," Hilary answered briefly.

"But we don't want our factory to resemble those places!" he said, seriously. "It seems to me that that yard could be floored."

"The trucks would chew it to pieces in no time!" old John said, pleased with his interest. "But now that you're here, we'll do great things!"

"They all prefer to cut across the yard, because it gives into Washington Street," Hilary explained, shyly. "They could go out the Market Street door."

Craig listened to her attentively. When she had finished he gave her a sudden smile, his sober face changing pleasantly as he did so.

"A short cut to those tea-pots!" he suggested to his uncle. Old Spaulding assented jovially; it was a great delight to him to have "the boy" here. Craig's coming had caused quite a stir in the nicest social set of Mount Holly, and the Spauldings, whose daughters were married and gone from home, enjoyed the little excitement.

Even now the telephone rang peremptorily; Mrs. Cutler White expected her daughter and some young friends from college for a house-party next week-end. Was Mr. Craig Spaulding there? Might she just say "Welcome home!" and ask him if he could join them?

Hilary handed him the telephone gravely; she liked his abstracted, almost annoyed expression as he politely snubbed the ubiquitous Mrs. White. He expected to

spend almost all his Sundays in New York with his parents, he said pleasantly.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, half-humorously, when the conversation was over, hanging up the receiver, and looking pathetically at his companions.

"You'll have a good deal of that, my boy!" his uncle warned him.

"Well, now, let's see. What's this office, Uncle John?"

"This we call 'outer office.' Mine opens from this, you see. Old Kraut—you remember our manager, old Kraut?—has his desk here, and Miss Collier sits here and protects me from the Black Hand and the evil eye——"

"Telephone calls go through her?" Craig asked, smiling.

"Always!"

"Ah, well, then," he said, in relief, "all I need do is enlist the kindly aid of Miss Collier. Kind as she looks, I imagine she can be a martinet! And, as soon as I am really started here, I shall instruct her to give me no social calls of any description. How about that, Miss Collier?"

"That can be managed," Hilary said, capably. Her heart was beating in pleasant excitement. It would be a delightful variation of the dull office routine to have this interesting person here in the old factory and to feel that business would give them an inevitable friendship.

"Miss Collier is a very extraordinary person, Craig," old John said, amiably. "We're going to lose her, one of these days, like all the rest of the good ones!"

Hilary, smiling, with hot cheeks, realized that this little introduction of the personal did not especially interest Craig, and she wished that her garrulous old employer would hold his peace.

"She takes her little sister abroad, to study music, in a year or two," John Spaulding went on. "Extraordinary child!"

Craig looked kindly at Hilary, and she saw, with a rush of gratitude, that he perfectly appreciated that the introduction of her own affairs was none of her doing.

"I supposed, of course, that it was something else," he said, with his keen look.

"Oh, no—no—no! I don't imagine Miss Collier has much use for the Mount Holly boys!" his uncle laughed. And then immediately they were all talking business in a most businesslike way. Craig would come down in the morning; Hilary would please tell Hubert to bring in the desk, and fix the lights. The young man and his uncle would go over everything at ten o'clock, and so on.

"Sorry to have kept you, Miss Collier," said her employer. "The train was late, and I thought we might go over that invoice from Goldbaum to-night. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" Her telephone trilled. With her serious eyes upon the two men she lifted it to her chest. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Underwood," they heard her say. "Yes, I believe Mr. Craig Spaulding arrived this afternoon. Shall I try to get him for you? Yes, that would be better, I think. You could probably get him at the house later on."

She set down the instrument; all three smiled.

"Miss Collier," said Craig Spaulding, with his finished, brisk air, "consider yourself retained at any price!"

Hilary echoed their cheerful good-nights, and went through the darkened abandoned offices with a singing heart. She locked the coat-room, let herself out past the watchman, at a side door, and turned off into the quiet little back street that had been her own personal world since childhood. She had to pick her way, there was treacherous slush underfoot, and here among the big trees and decorous old brick walls the street-lights did not help very effectively. She knew all these houses and the people in them: she and Dora had their favourites among the old pink and cream brick buildings, admired this old Revolutionary balcony, or that gracious line of side wall.

She could see lights upstairs in the Brewster house; Minnie and her father and mother were putting the baby to bed. They made a great fuss about Minnie's baby, the first grandchild. And the Fosters' side parlour was lighted; perhaps Tom and 'Lizabeth were home. The family never used it otherwise.

Her own lane ran close under the yellow stream from the tall windows; the Colliers' little home was a tiny brick building of four rooms. It was detached from the big house beside it, now, but it was still called what it had once in fact been: "the Carolan kitchen." It stood, a graceful little wing, beside the shabby old main house. Both were of creamy brick, mellowed by the snows and summers of nearly two hundred years.

The girl was thrilling, as she hurried home in the cold dark, and was annoyed to feel herself thrilling, to the memory of that last few minutes of talk with Craig

in the outer office. It would be good to get home, and begin to toast the croutons, and tell Dora the great news of Kronski. Nothing could be more ridiculous than that Hilary Collier should allow her thoughts to linger even a moment upon the personality of Craig Spaulding.

He was rich; he was—even Hilary could see it!—supremely a man of the world. He thought no more of his uncle's secretary than she herself thought of the policeman who took her across a muddy Philadelphia crossing, or the conductor who punched her ticket in the train. Women always admired rich and brilliant men, and he was more than that; she knew that he was good and steady and kind. He was probably engaged at this minute to some girl of his own type, some rich and lovely creature who moved in an atmosphere of perfumes and furs and violets, and great, softly lighted drawing rooms.

The Underwood girls! Hilary's lip curled scornfully. They had not lost much time! Neither one of *them* need hope for him . . . An odd little pang of envy surprised her: at least they were of his world, and she was not.

She came to her own gate: a narrow gate in an old brick wall. It would be good to get home to warmth and rest and Dora.

"Consider yourself retained . . . kind as she looks, I imagine she can be a little martinet!" How his phrases and tones came back to her! There had been few men in her busy life; never one like this one. So strangely potent is the first hint of sex in a girl's heart that these casual phrases, tossed into Hilary Collier's

full and ordered life, were enough to distress her, to upset her careful planning, to stir vaguely the depths that she had never suspected in her own being. Kronski's coming marked, she knew, a crisis in her life; coming coincidentally with Dora's eighteenth birthday, his unexpected appearance had all the gravity of a moving Fate.

Yet here she was, her mind working busily along an entirely new line of thought, like that of any one of the foolish village girls in the factory, because old Spaulding's nephew, exiled for a few months from his clubs and his polo and his yachting, had deigned to draw her into a moment's careless friendship.

She felt within her a stern self-contempt as she opened the kitchen door.

CHAPTER II

The room was lighted; but the stove was cold and empty, and Dora was not in sight. Hilary felt a moment's check, then she crossed the floor, and looked into the larger room that was used as a sitting room. There was darkness here, but she heard through it a sound that troubled her. She touched a light.

Yes, it was one of Butterfly's bad days; she was crying. Hilary instantly experienced a change of mood. All her serenity, all her cheerful anticipation, vanished; Dora was blue. The older sister must rally herself, as she had done a thousand times before in the child's stormy life, to meet this demand. She must soothe and comfort the little Butterfly, broken on the wheel of her own temperament; Kronski must not be introduced now.

Flinging aside her hat and coat, she sank to her knees, and gathered the little form close in her embrace. The light shone brightly upon Dora's dishevelled golden hair, but the rest of the room showed only a highlight here and there in the soft gloom: the surface of the old piano, the red geranium blooms, the tarnished gilt frame of an oval-framed picture. In the small, steel-rodded grate the last of a small coal fire was sucking busily and smokily on one great lump of coal.

"Butterfly, dearest! What is it?"

Dora sat up, revealed a tear-wet face, raised shamed

brown eyes to her sister, breathed deeply, and recovered something of her self-control.

"I didn't hear you! Is it five o'clock?" she faltered.

"It's after five. But, darling, what is it?"

Dora's eyes watered again; she attempted carelessness.

"Oh, nothing!" she answered, hardily.

"But, sweetheart, it's *something!*"

"No—nothing." Dora smoothed the little lace collar on Hilary's velvet gown, gulped, and smiled shakily. She kept her eyes on her own fingers. "You—you won't get your dinner until late, poor Hilary!"she said, thickly.

"Oh, as if that mattered! But tell me why you were crying, Butterfly?"

Dora sniffed, laid one arm about her sister's neck, and answered with a great weariness and filling eyes:

"Oh, I don't know. I get lonely!"

"Did you practise?"

"Yes, four hours. And all on that one passage!"

Hilary's eyes grew enlightened.

"Not that one cadenza?"

Dora nodded seriously.

"But—my darling!" Hilary cried, in deep relief, "no wonder that made you blue! A cold, bleak day like this, shut up in the house, struggling with that thing! I begged you at lunch-time to get out and walk—I thought you'd go out the Rancocas road, and perhaps see Miss Latimer! You poor little thing——"

"I don't know—I got thinking, Hilary," Dora said, in a quiet, rain-washed voice, her exquisite cheek against her sister's, their arms locked, "I got thinking how dull it is here in this little place. We never have

any *fun*, you and I, we're always *planning* what we mean to do—but I'm eighteen now, and you're twenty-three, and here we are, stuck, just like poor old Miss Latimer or the Ertzes—nothing ever happens to us! I don't want to go abroad—when I'm *old!* I saw Gertrude Morrill go by to-day—she's too good to speak to me, of course, because my sister works in her grandfather's factory! But—I don't know," faltered Dora, with signs of breaking again, "I don't know, but she had on a big white woolly fur, and one of those big belted coats——"

"My darling, but you know that in a few years all this will seem the littlest place in the world to you," Hilary began, patiently. "You'll know Paris, Butterfly, and Italy! You'll give concerts in London——"

Hilary's voice was eager, confident. The burden of such hours as ever came to them of depression and doubt she must carry alone. She could spare Dora, but Dora never spared her. Now she experienced the only real fright she ever knew: when the actual plan itself seemed to fail Dora. With poverty, work, illness, with any obstacle to her scheme, Hilary could, and she did constantly, cope. But when Butterfly took this tone of indifference to the all-but-achieved design, then Hilary was frightened.

"You want to go with me to Paris, dear," she murmured now, soothingly. "Think of the big ship, Dora, and of going into some studio with your violin——" Suddenly she brightened, her tone grew secure. "And oh, Dora, wait until you hear the news! They were putting the posters up this afternoon. Kronski is coming! And you and I are going to meet him!"

Dora's beautiful sulky eyes brightened eagerly.

"Mother's Kronski?"

"Yes, Konrad Kronski. He gives a violin concert in Philadelphia next month!"

"Oh, Hilary—and shall you write him?"

"I have," Hilary answered, magnificently. Dora was obviously impressed. This was a high-handed way of dealing with the great.

"Hilary! But don't thousands of people write him?"

"Thousands may," Hilary said, serenely, getting to her feet and hanging up her hat and coat. She buttoned a big apron over her office dress, an unusual concession to fatigue. "But do you suppose that there is any one else in America who can say that his mother was her mother's intimate friend?" she asked, splendidly. "You see, Butterfly," Hilary went on, in the kitchen now, and inspecting a soup-pan containing cold, frozen thick soup that gave off a somewhat daunting odour of carrots and onions, "you see, dear, we have never taken any particular part in the social life of this town, first because we couldn't afford it, and secondly, because we were too busy. But this Kronski is our kind, Butterfly. If Mother and Dad were here, I don't doubt but that he'd come and stay with us!"

"Oh, Hilary Collier!" Dora exclaimed, in delighted amaze, setting the kitchen table neatly for two, "Kronski! Why, everyone will be after him!"

"That's exactly what you don't understand," Hilary said, sticking cubed bread into a cold oven that smelt faintly of gas, to dry. "In Europe people don't go by money—the Spauldings and the Underwoods wouldn't have it all their own way, there. He would

come to us, to have Mother talk to him about Warsaw and all their friends there. And Mother would have cooked for him just as she did for us, and they would have kept dashing in to the piano to try this thing and that, as they did when Klingmann was here. You don't remember that, and he's dead now, anyway. But he and his wife stayed here three days, when they came to America, and Mother made me play for them!—you were only a few months old, it was the summer after Brother died. And you don't know what that's like, Dora—what *fun* it is!"

The kitchen was warming now, and the heating soup smelled every instant more delicious. Hilary's face was aglow, and Dora was entirely restored to her usual radiance and happiness. When Hilary talked this way, with all the confidence of the cosmopolitan, Dora felt the premonitory thrill of her great destiny in her veins. Three hundred and sixty-four days a year they were just the Colliers, living in the "Carolan Kitchen" on soups and apples and bowls of chocolate. But there was one day more, now and then, when Kronski came, or when some other chance reminded them that their mother had been Sabine Charpentier, and their father Bronson Collier, the friend of half the musicians of Europe.

They sat down to soup, and yesterday's macaroni, and baked pears. Hilary had had early training in her mother's exquisite European thrift; meat seldom came into the Collier house, and there was rare baking of cake. Quite unconscious that she differed from the housekeepers all about her, Hilary had grown to womanhood feeling that a baked, mealy potato with

butter, or a menu of graham muffins with chocolate, was a deliciously satisfying meal. All summer long their six little fruit trees supplied Dora and herself with desserts, and all winter long they were drawing upon the housewifely store of dried peaches and apples and vegetables in the cellar. They went over their accounts every month; three dollars to the butcher, seventeen to the grocer, something more than sixty left, when all was paid, for the bank, and felt themselves rich.

"Hilary, would Kronski come and dine with us?" Dora asked.

"He might." Hilary scraped her bowl, looked thoughtful. "We could have the chowder, and cheese and rye bread from the delicatessen store, and I'll make the almond cake!" she reflected, hospitably.

"Oh, Hilary!" Dora exclaimed. For the almond cake was always an event; a morning's careful work with nuts and chocolate and the old mortar and pestle.

"We'll go to the concert," Hilary decided, "and see him first. Or perhaps he'll send us such a nice answer to my letter than we can ask him anyway."

Dora's deep eyes were full of content; events were moving at last. It was not until she and Hilary were finished with the few dishes, and the kitchen restored to order, that she came forth from her day-dream.

"Did Craig Spaulding come?"

"Yes," Hilary began, and stopped. Again that absurd little shudder of reminiscence went over her. Again she saw the big hand with the gloves, and caught the faint fragrance of fine linen and fine soaps that hung about this young man. And again she seemed to hear the deep voice . . .

"Well, what's he like?" demanded Dora.

"Oh——" Hilary roused herself. "Just what I remembered. He's better looking, he looks hard and brown, rather."

"He plays polo," supplied Dora. "Do you like him?"

"I didn't think of liking him or not," Hilary said, sensibly, going out to the ice-box with the soup-kettle. She returned, empty-handed. "The Underwood girls were going over to-night," she added, conscious again of that faint, surprising pang of envy.

"Leave it to them!" Dora observed, in scorn. The sisters settled down at the table in the sitting room and took up their Italian grammars. An old Italian lady had moved into the neighbourhood some three years ago, and Hilary had thought the opportunity too fine to be lost. She and Dora and Madama Ghecchi could chatter easily now in the new tongue. There was no special need for it, might never be, but Hilary's zeal knew no bounds where Dora's education was concerned.

Two or three times she found herself looking dreamily up from her book. This was insanity, she told herself contemptuously. But the warmth of it ran deliciously, weakeningly, in her veins.

"Sis, how old is he?" Dora asked, suddenly, when they were undressing, at half-past nine.

"About thirty, I think!" Hilary answered, unguardedly.

"Konrad Kronski! I thought he was fifty!"

"Oh—oh, I see!" Hilary was utterly confused. "Oh, he's about twenty-eight," she amended, hastily. "He was born before Mother was married: she was quite

young, studying in Vienna. It was before she met Dad."

"He's young," mused Dora. "Whom did you think I meant?" she asked.

Hilary did not answer. She had washed her face and hands with warm water and soap, braided the thick, mahogany-coloured hair, turned down the two beds, arranged her clothing neatly on a chair. Now she knelt down, and covered her face with her fresh, clean, soap-scented hands. Dora, impressed, followed suit; they always said their prayers aloud, usually locking hands affectionately before the little ceremony was done. She went to sleep wondering why Craig Spaulding had never married . . . What sort of women he admired . . .

CHAPTER III

Craig Spaulding came down to the office the next morning, and the entire factory immediately felt the benefit of the new influence in the place. He had a big desk in his uncle's room, as befitted the president's son and prospective owner of the plant, but he also had a desk in the outer office, where Hilary and old Kraut spent their days, and, in the beginning, there was hardly an hour when he did not refer to the girl for information or direction.

"She's remarkable; she ought to be in the city office," he told his uncle. "We'll have to do something about that trip to Europe!" But to Hilary he made no sign, except by his always-ready, quiet smile of thanks, and his respectful and appreciative manner. They worked together, side by side, day after day, and Hilary noted that his attitude toward her never changed from the pleasant, friendly aspect he had shown her on the very first night of their acquaintance.

But on her side this was not the case. She was bewildered by the persistence with which her thoughts played with the entirely improbable rôle of her being his wife. Hilary was essentially practical, any good thing that had ever come her way she had always seized, for herself and Dora. Now, against her will, her thoughts were all of the immense advantage of a good marriage—of this marriage. Whether to be most angry or most

amused at herself she did not know; what she did know was that Craig must never have cause to suspect that his uncle's secretary, "like half the other idiot women of his acquaintance," Hilary phrased it in her thoughts, had fallen in love with him, and was busy with a hundred details of the wedding as she demurely went about his office.

At least, Hilary supposed that what she felt was the process known as falling in love. She had had no other experience with which to compare it. She would never have supposed herself capable of such folly, had not the actual evidence been constantly with her, the quick sense of colour leaving or flooding her face, the bewildering disquiet of her senses, her acute consciousness of Craig's presence, her ridiculous jealousy when he went away, to be with other people, and above all and under all, an uneasy sense that she must not let this extraordinary opportunity, if it was an opportunity, escape her. His interest, his money and position, would solve the great problem of poverty once and for all. Besides, he was brilliant and charming. His least word to her she remembered, and she eagerly gathered such crumbs as fell from the loaded table of his casual conversation.

He knew everything, and every place, and everyone worth while, she thought. Writers, diplomats, prominent persons of all sorts were his friends. He was at home in the most exclusive houses in the land; phrases about tennis, about books, about travel, as he uttered them, fascinated her.

Like many another pretty woman, Hilary grew actually beautiful in this time of hopes and dreams. She did not seriously analyze the situation herself;

there was nothing to analyze. But Dora noted the change in her, the softness in her blue eyes, the glow of her cheeks, the loosened beauty of the rich soft hair that Hilary had always kept so primly close and plain.

"Hilary, what's the matter with you?" Dora asked more than once.

"Matter?" Hilary would compose her dancing heart and dancing eyes into something like their old decorum.

"Yes. You didn't hear me! Did the tickets come?"

"The——? Oh, Kronski, of course. Yes, they came." But Hilary's smile still held behind it something that baffled Dora. It was as if the elder sister were meditating upon some delectable secret.

She had her bad times. There were hours when the obvious chasm between her lot and Craig's caused her the keenest depression. What an idiot she was to let herself enjoy this purely accidental propinquity, she would reflect. He knew dozens of girls—hundreds—who could offer him all that she could, and a thousand times more! They haunted him, these fortunate, exquisite girls; they telephoned him from New York, included him in their plans. They bought glorious frocks at the Avenue shops, chattered about concerts and riding-lessons, they were little triumphs of beauty and culture and sophistication and charm! When he went to New York, as he frequently did on Saturday afternoons, Hilary was actually unhappy and uneasy; and with all her old level-headed philosophy she could not laugh herself out of it.

Still, men did fall in love with girls, and marry them, she reasoned. And she was a gentlewoman, and her blood was as good as his own——

But what nonsense, what nonsense, what nonsense! Even had she had anything to build upon, any tender word of admiring glance from Craig, this would be rank treason to what all her life had been building and planning: Dora, and Dora's trip, must come first. She could not indulge in any personal dream. Had she not promised her father to be loyal to his hopes, and her mother's hopes, for Dora? Was this ridiculous and baseless dream to make Hilary wretched, and perhaps to wreck Dora's future as well?

She had nothing to encourage it, she told herself with bitter honesty. There was hardly a woman of his acquaintance whose claim upon Craig was not more substantial than her own. And the world, Hilary, under the impression that she was concluding the topic once and for all, reminded herself—the world was full of amorous stenographers falling in love with their employers. It must *stop*.

But it did not stop. Hilary was young; younger in this particular phase of her nature than are most girls of twenty-three, and she had never met a man of Craig's type before. She could only conceal her ridiculous daydream, and trust that the passing of a few months would restore her to her usual common sense, and effect a complete cure.

One icy afternoon, when Craig had been about three weeks in Mount Holly, they were alone in the office. John Spaulding and his wife were with a married daughter, in Philadelphia, and old Kraut was at home with a heavy cold. Hilary had been quite aware of the situation all day as she went demurely about with invoices and correspondence; Craig had busied himself

in the inner office, coming to her door only for an occasional inquiry or comment upon the work of the day.

The sky had been lowering and bleak all day; now the first shy flakes of what promised to be a genuine blizzard began to fall upon the packed and dirty snow of Washington Street; lights shone pinkly out across it from the stores, and shoppers began to hurry home, commenting in neighbourly fashion upon the weather as they piled bundles into Fords, or gathered up shabby reins.

In the outer office Hilary's air-tight stove was roaring, and the droplights in their dangling green cones made pools of rich light here and there. She was finishing her letters busily at half-past four when Craig came out of the inner office, lighted a cigarette, and sat down comfortably at Kraut's desk, leaning back in the swivel chair, and watching her idly with smiling eyes.

"Pleasant about that Abbott matter, wasn't it?" he asked her, when she had reached the stamping stage.

"Thrown out of court—yes, he had no case!" Hilary answered, tranquilly, with her friendly smile. But her heart came to an odd stop, twisted, wrenched itself straight again, and went on at double speed. Perhaps this was the beginning——!

"By the way, my uncle and aunt may go to the Kronski concert on Saturday night," Craig said, suddenly. "I heard him in New York last week, you know. He made a tremendous hit."

"You told me," Hilary said, wishing desperately that she were one of the women who could always say something bright and unexpected.

"How do you go?" Craig pursued.

"On Saturday? We take the two o'clock train for Philadelphia, and have supper there," Hilary answered.

"And it's a great event for you and little sister?"

"Oh, rather!" She *must* interest him, she thought, and not sit here answering him stupidly, like a person filling out a blank. "It's her career, you know," she ventured further. "My mother and my father had set their hearts upon Dora's success!"

"Yes, but what do you personally feel about it," Craig asked, with his keen air of interest. "Do you think the child has the perseverance and patience in her?"

A week ago Hilary would have answered this with a rush of enthusiastic details; she would have given him all her hopes and plans for Dora in a glad confusion. But she had had her lesson; if he could be reserved, she could be reserved, too.

She hated to remember the few words that had passed between them a week ago. Yet she did remember them, with a flaming face, every night when she was in bed, and many times during the day. It had happened one afternoon when Craig, passing her desk, had looked at Dora's picture—the clumsy old graduation picture of Dora that made her look fat and hoydenish, and yet that recalled to Hilary all of Dora's beauty and slimness!—and had asked carelessly:

"Where do you and this prodigy of yours keep yourselves hidden, Miss Collier?"

"In the cottage next to the old Carolan house—what they call the Carolan kitchen down Sugarhouse Lane!" Hilary had answered, she hated to remember how

readily. And she had added, "Why don't you come dine with us some night—we're all by ourselves—and let us play for you?"

"Thank you. That would be delightful!" Craig had said. But between his quiet words and her own Hilary had had time to realize—or perhaps his expression had enlightened her—just the impropriety of such an invitation, and her heart had been sick within her. She was his uncle's employee; she knew his aunt merely in a formal way; she was not entertained at the Spaulding house, nor did she move in the Spaulding set.

A town like Mount Holly is merciless in such small social distinctions; full consciousness of them flooded Hilary even as she spoke. She had seemed ready to assume that Craig Spaulding might wish to begin a friendship that would be instantly recognized from one end of the town to the other as highly significant. How could he come to the little house in Sugarhouse Lane from the Spauldings' mansion, where Hilary was not invited and accepted?

Covered with miserable confusion, she had allowed the conversation to end with no suggestion of a definite date for the proposed dinner, and since that day she had burned with humiliation to realize that Craig had not reopened the subject. She had even fancied that his dignity and inscrutability had been a little more marked than usual since then.

So that to-day's little overture of friendship was more than normally welcome, and Hilary was on her guard to show no sign of anything in her manner not strictly in accordance with mere business civility.

"That is the only thing that ever worries me," she

admitted now. "Dora. She's like my father, you know, and he was restless—moody."

Anything of this sort interested Craig acutely; he had followed up many a charity case, analyzed the personality of the enlisted men under him, marvelled at the miracles of individuality that are incessantly displaying themselves in this curious world.

"Tell me about that—not morbid?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Morbid! Dora?" Hilary echoed, cheerfully. "You never saw anybody so normal and so sweet-tempered most of the time! But that's just it," she added, knitting her forehead distressedly, "she's almost too normal. I *want* her to be a freak," Hilary confessed, whimsically. "Freaks succeed. I don't want her—she's so pretty!—to fall in love with some man——" She suddenly recalled, and interrupted herself; her tone flattened. "However, she won't!" she concluded, smilingly.

"And suppose *you* do?" Craig asked, still watching her with his pleasant, interested expression. This was carrying the war into her camp; Hilary was conscious of a spasmodic action of her heart. "You aren't supposed to sacrifice your whole life to your little sister, I suppose?" he added.

"T-t-time to think of that when it c-c-comes!" stuttered Hilary. "Why don't you lock your arms about his neck and kiss him, while you're about it?" she asked herself, furiously.

"I don't know why it need be Europe, myself," Craig pursued, with interest. "We have some remarkable people in New York now—the war has driven hundreds of them to us. She could do just as well in

New York, with her music, I should think. And then—saying for the sake of argument that you married—" he smiled brilliantly, "it seems to me that you could do even more for her than you can now!"

"Perhaps so," Hilary answered, suffocating. She turned to her desk, opened a drawer, fumbled within it, and wheeled back to face him again. This was definite enough! This was something to remember, and to hug to herself to-night, when the light was out!

"And by the way, have you heard from Kronski?" the man asked, suddenly.

"No, not yet," she answered, serenely. But she and Dora meant to take the Amati into Philadelphia anyway; they would surely see him after the concert. "You see, his mother knew my mother," she reiterated, confidently.

Craig, who knew something, he thought, of famous musicians and their demoralizing popularity, was not so sure. Better men than Kronski had ignored stronger claims. He hoped that there was not a bitter disappointment in store for ardent, interesting Miss Collier, with her shining blue eyes and her demure little velvet dresses. She was rather non-committal to-night, for some reason. That or some other cause made him unusually interested in drawing her out.

"Just what are your plans for Europe? Have you considered what it means?" he asked.

"To the last penny!" she laughed. "Butterfly—I mean my sister Dora—and I have spent nights and nights and nights covering paper with calculations. My father told me that we should need a thousand a year——"

"A year!" Craig exclaimed. "A month, don't you mean?"

"Oh, hear him!" she said, amusedly. "No, indeed, I mean a year. And I don't believe it'll be that in Germany now. Then there's passage—another three hundred, for I shan't dare go actual steerage—although I know we could, perfectly. But we'll go second. My father said that we needn't worry about more than three years—Butterfly'll have concert work, after that, even if I should sit around doing nothing! But I'm ready for four years, in case of sickness, or some unexpected expense——"

"You mean you've got four thousand dollars saved?" Craig demanded. He had done settlement work in college, he had followed budgets, reports, average incomes and expenditures through a generous press; he knew something of America's besetting weakness.

"I will have more than that; almost five," she answered, proudly, a little ashamed of her practicability, and a little afraid, in this unsuspected first instant of his real admiration of her as an individual, that she might be losing some vaguely defined glamour or charm in his eyes.

"You—but how much of it have you saved?" Craig demanded.

"Well, almost all. My father left insurance, but then we hadn't finished paying for the house when he died; I had to go on with that. And Butterfly was ill, and I had to pay old Mrs. Poett twenty-two dollars a month for—oh, for years. She took care of us, and the house——"

"But—but what does my uncle pay you, in the name of all that's sensible!"

"I came in at seven dollars a week—just fruit-season extra help, you know. But then they kept me on at forty a month, and then fifty."

"Which you couldn't live on?" he said.

"Which of course we could and did live on!" Hilary answered, amused.

Craig continued to regard her, absorbed.

"And now we are paying you . . . ?" he said.

"Oh, *now!* Forty a week," she told him proudly.

That was all. Craig made some rather non-committal comment, looked at his wrist-watch; Hilary glanced at her own. Five o'clock and she must go home to Dora, she thought. Five o'clock, thought Craig, and he must get home to dress for that accursed dinner at the Dwyers' twenty-two miles away.

But Hilary was content. To-morrow was the great date of the Kronski concert; and to-night she and Craig Spaulding had approached something nearer friendship than they had even known. Life, she thought, could be very wonderful!

Her contented generalities rapidly developed into definite details; there was a great deal to do about costumes, for to-morrow. Dora met her at the door with a bright and eager face.

"Hilary, tell me—must you go to the office to-morrow?"

Compunction, almost shame, smote Hilary. She had planned to ask for a holiday to-morrow, the better to prepare for the afternoon's excitement. And she had not quite forgotten it. But she had not really wanted to lose an office day, with its breath-taking possibilities of a few words here and there with Craig.

"Why don't you *take* it?" Dora urged, seeing her omission in her face. "Oh, go on! Old Kraut wasn't there to ask, and Mr. Spaulding is in Philadeldelphia. Craig Spaulding won't care—he's going to Bermuda anyway, next week, with the Vanderworts!"

"Who said he was?" Hilary asked, her heart turning to lead. There it was again, his utter superiority to anything in Mount Holly, or in her little sphere.

"Maude Underwood did—I met her in the post office. She said that he was simply crazy about young Mrs. Reggy Vanderwort, even before she was married——"

"Oh, gracious, I wish people wouldn't talk to you that way, Butterfly!" Hilary exclaimed. Dora's bright face grew a little rosy; she looked hurt.

"Maude said that Craig Spaulding gave a big dinner at some New York club when he was in town last week. . . ." Dora pursued, innocently. A perfectly unreasonable ache of jealousy seized Hilary; she wished to hear no more. To put on her old gingham kitchen dress, and begin to putter with bowls of cold rice and icy, sticky stewed prunes seemed almost a physical impossibility to-night.

CHAPTER IV

MEANWHILE Craig had gotten himself into irreproachable evening wear, and shaken himself into his big fur-lined coat, and set forth into forbidding darkness to drive the long miles between his home and his dinner. The Dwyers were enormously wealthy friends from New York, who had a country place near Philadelphia, where they occasionally gave winter house-parties, inviting—as Craig well knew—a decidedly mixed crowd of the younger social set, the older crowd, his own crowd, of visiting Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Italians, of writers, actors, dancers, and notabilities generally, and trusting, as Mrs. Dwyer amiably and stupidly phrased it, that "after dinner, you know, when we've all had something to drink, you know, things'll kind of warm up!"

Amiability and stupidity were indeed the characteristics of his hostess to-night; although Nettie Dwyer had been a lean, uneducated, fiery little variety hall dancer thirty years ago. She had worn the coquettish tights and tipped sailor hats of the middle 'nineties' vaudeville with entrancing grace. With their aid she had captured young Cyrus Bigelow Dwyer, III, a heavy-headed, supremely dull-looking youth whose thick full mouth was permanently half opened in a vacuous laugh.

Nettie had borne him children, had discovered her ancestors, had developed unsuspected deeps of snob-

bishness, and had put on some hundred and fifty pounds, in thirty years. Cyrus III could not approve of all her methods, but he considered her extremely brilliant. He thought their life of travel, of rushing and laughing and buying and shouting and eating and drinking, an infinite improvement upon the lives his mother and aunts lived in old brick houses in Washington Square. They all turned their noses up at Net, he said, but Net had more brains than the whole boiling!

Net was now an immensely stout woman with a red face under a beautifully dressed mahogany "transformation." She had a deep, harsh, humorous voice, fat fingers loaded with rings, and an uproarious idea of what constituted a good time. Her three slender, smart, colourless girls considered "M'ma" to be what they described as "the official extension of the limit," but under her insensitive guidance they lived unusually full lives. All three had married young; Dorothy, the middle and plainest girl, was the wife of a prosperous New York broker, and had a little boy. Cissy, the oldest, was divorced from some Chicagoan that nobody knew much about, and had artistic ambitions, puttered in sculptor's clay, appeared in a moving picture with professionals, and posed in her beautiful city studio in a succession of startling gowns, smoking incessantly, carrying on flirtations with all sorts of disreputable or questionable men, and under all her ventures worrying incessantly over the horrible possibility of getting fat like M'ma.

Violet, the youngest daughter, who had been for three years Mrs. Reggy Vanderwort, had always been Craig's favourite of the three. She was an extraordinarily thin, frail, polished little bit of humanity, with eyes that

matched her name, with a self-confidence that nothing in life could shake, and with an unalterable and profound boredom as her chief characteristic. She had gone through the overwhelming ritual of a sensational society wedding as unmoved as the Vanderwort pearls themselves. Craig had watched her that day: the small, dark, sculptured head bowed under masses of virginal filmy veils, the tiny foot cased in its shining satin slipper; he had studied the bridesmaids, the fashionable crush, the reporters, the strains of music, the perfumes and softly heated air, the Bishop all fatherly solemnity, the slanting snowy lines of thousands of Easter lilies, and, outside, the crowd, in the spring sunshine of the Avenue.

How cool, how lovely and detached and sure of herself she had been beside poor Reggy, who, as usual, had had too much to drink, and beside her florid mother, of whom the same might be suspected! What a figure, in the social life of the city—the tea dances, the opera, the shops on the Avenue—little Mrs. Reggy with her cool little comments of "putrid" or "divine" had become!

Now there was already talk of trouble. Craig heard that she was staying with her mother and father for awhile. He devoutly hoped, as his motor lights at last picked up the pretentious house of stone, with its gargoyles and its Norman arches, that this was not so. She would be a great fool to throw over the Vanderwort millions, Reggy or no Reggy.

A gush of light poured from the immense doorway; men-servants met him. Across the dim luxuriousness of the enormous entrance hall he could see dim, spacious

rooms, and far beyond them, what seemed a quarter of a mile away, the figures of beautifully dressed women and the black forms of men in evening dress circling in a bright pool of light. Craig, perfectly at home here, made his way toward them.

His hostess immediately detached herself from the group.

"Oh, for heaven's sakes!" she said, with a sort of indulgent amazement, although she had expected him, and he knew it. "Imagine you coming all this way a night like this!" And she introduced him to the distinguished-looking man to whom she was talking, "This is one of my boys, M'so' Packarr—Mr. Craig Spaulding," she said.

Craig, shaking hands with Monsieur Pacquard, felt a certain disloyal amusement stir within him. He had chanced never to meet Mrs. Dwyer until some three years ago; she and her children had been in Europe all the years that he was a child. As for his mother and his Spaulding cousins, they were very conscientiously ignorant of her existence.

Now he was introduced as "one of her boys." No matter, he thought, turning to some of the others. They all swarmed eagerly about him. Several rounds of cocktails had been served, and quiet maids in caps and aprons were passing more, and the tiny slices of paste-smeared toast, cut into hearts and shields and diamonds and clover-leaves that accompanied the cocktails. Cyrus IV was there; the group about the enormous fireplace had been listening to his account of securing liquor straight through from a man in Montreal. Everybody had something to contribute to the fascinating topic.

"Poor Bill got nicely stung!" a young girl said, smiling.

"Gosh, my sixty-thousand-dollar vault . . ." Bill growled. There was a general laugh. These persons were so well acquainted that it was rarely necessary for them to finish a sentence.

"Hear what happened to Joe?"

"Yes. Wasn't that the limit?"

"Walt says that this feller Eisenbaum told him . . ."

"Yes, I know. He was telling me!"

"Claret, huh?"

"Yes, and Walt said this Unger, whoever he is, got a lot of Baccardi."

"Yep, so he said. Tell you what he paid for it, Roy?"

"Who, Walt?"

"Nope, this other feller."

"He didn't say."

"We've got a lot of genuine absinthe," said a beautiful woman of perhaps thirty-five, waving a flame-coloured fan. "Luckiest thing you ever heard of. George and I were having the most ghastly quarrel yesterday morning, and George slammed away from the breakfast table—most disgusting thing, what the servants think I don't know——"

"It's nothing to me if my wife makes a damn fool of herself," said George himself, in a sort of sulky aside.

"George was tellin' us at the Club about that absinthe," a young man began. But Mrs. George continued the narrative. Craig, bored with nearly two years of the subject, turned toward the small and exquisitely dressed woman who had come to stand quietly beside

him. Violet Vanderwort was beautiful to-night in a gown of moss-green velvet against whose smooth lines a great parrot, in blazing blues and oranges, had been embroidered. She wore sweeping parrot feathers in her hair, and her fan showed the same barbaric splendour. She was a pale woman, who dieted and massaged and steamed herself almost into anemia; all the Dwyer girls were afraid of getting fat.

"How's Vi?" he asked, with a brother's keen smile.

"Not any too buxom, Si!" she answered, using a phrase from a certain rather coarse story that had been going the rounds. "Reg tells me you won't go to Nassau with us. Come and make love to me somewhere!"

"What, before dinner?"

She looked down, with an unchanged expression of boredom and dissatisfaction upon her face.

"You're better at it after dinner?" she asked.

They had moved a little apart from the group, and were in the somewhat sheltered angle of a great, diamond-paned window embrasure. Craig smiled at the petulant, lovely face.

"You ought to know, Vi!" he reminded her briefly.

For answer she looked up with sudden animation and fire; she was always playing parts, thankful only to any one who gave her an opportunity.

"You never asked me, Craig!" she said, in a low voice.

"No, dear," Craig said, after the correct pause. "And I never went over and asked the Princess Tatiana of Russia, either."

"Ah, Craig, you're nice!" Violet said, raising her

eyes and smiling. And as a maid appeared with more cocktails she took one, and sipped it daintily, while Craig lighted his cigarette.

"Craig!" a dashing young matron challenged him, joining them suddenly, "tell me some naughty stories. You men are getting so stingy with them. Rose West told me one yesterday—I was telling Vi. Hear about—I oughtn't to drink this, my husband will skin me—hear about the little boy and the airplane?"

Craig had heard it, but he had to listen to it again. "Bobby" Wendell, as this sprightly lady was called, had a reputation for shady stories, and for violent oaths at the card-table, as well. To him, who had carried into his unbelieving twenties a recollection of his church-going mother and aunts, her broad irreverences were shocking as well, but there was small piety in this particular group.

"Say, Craig," she said, when Violet had left them alone, "don't you think it is something awful the way people are talking about Vi and Reggy?"

Craig disliked the woman, and he disliked the custom, common in this society, of instantly plunging into intimate revelations regarding any person who chanced to leave a group. So it was with his least encouraging aspect that he said:

"I didn't know they were."

"Didn't!" Mrs. Wendell echoed, animatedly and incredulously. "My dear, they say . . ." She told him what they said.

"That's nonsense!" Craig assured her, nettled and unconvinced.

Mrs. Wendell watched him shrewdly. She would

have liked him to believe it, but if he preferred to take it this way, she could turn even this to account.

"Isn't it too bad," she said, eagerly. "Of course there's not one word of truth in it! I was furious. I said to the people that told me, that everyone else in the world could talk about Vi, but that I thought it was utter nonsense. I'll tell you what let's do, Craig, you and I," she added, suddenly. Craig was again conscious of his keen dislike and contempt for her. He hated these loud-mouthed married women who were always planning things for him, "just you and I." "Let's form ourselves into a little club," suggested Bobby, "without saying one word to any one, and just stand up for Vi, and defend her, you know—that sort of thing. Shall we? She hasn't much judgment herself, poor child—never did have. One of the most intimate friends that Reggy's sister, Kate Pierson, has, told me that Reggy never would have married Vi, wasn't any more in love with her than he was with dozens of other girls—why, Reggy Vanderwort and I danced our first German together——"

"Say, aren't you folks going to eat?" said Mrs. Dwyer, hospitably, ponderously approaching. "Come on—you know there's going to be a lot more in to dance. Don't look so scared, Craig," she added, laughing, "just about forty in all. The Butlers and some people they have for dinner, and the Saunderses. It's a Hunt Dinner, you know, and I had the Misses Joseph come out from Philadelphia with a lot of favours," Mrs. Dwyer continued, with her air of a benefactress who is about to be interrupted and praised; "it was nothing; just to please the youngsters!"

"Call me up and take me to lunch some day," Bobby said, departing, "Oh, you can't—you're in Mount Holly. Well, maybe I'll come down and spend the day with you some day soon. Do you think you could amuse me? Is there a place we could eat?"

"How's your baby?" Craig asked. For a picture of young Mrs. Wendell and her beautiful child had been going the rounds of the fashionable magazines.

"Oh, he's adorable. He's with Grandma Wendell in Miami now," his mother said, cheerfully. "They make an awful fuss about him. Call me up!"

The crowd, some twenty-four in all, had meanwhile moved into the dining room. Mrs. Dwyer drew Craig aside in the great hall.

"Look here!" she said, with a face of amusement and pride. She opened a doorway, and he looked into a spacious pantry now filled with long sticks upon which were large wooden horses' heads plumed, bridled, and pennanted. Above them on a ladder a dignified young Jewish girl turned from the work of ranging great equine masks upon shelves. "Those are some of the favours, did you ever?" Mrs. Dwyer chuckled, admiringly. "The work we had to get them! The horses are all named for the real horses, you know. Well, it amuses the youngsters," she added, resuming her deprecatory, benevolent manner. "Watch Cy, won't you, Craig?" she added, in an aside. "Our regular bootlegger didn't come round this week, and God knows what the boy has been drinking! Isn't it terrible?"

Seated between Vi and a noisy eighteen-year-old named Harriet Hamilton, Craig felt a deep boredom seize him. Only the youngsters would dance later, and

ride about on the wooden horses, and wear the masks. The older crowd would play bridge for ten cents a point; "keep it low and then we all can enjoy it," Mrs. Dwyer would say. Bobby Wendell would become coarse; maids would pass liqueurs and whiskey and soda.

He had said, in accepting this invitation, that he was working hard, and might have to go home early. Now he decided to make his excuses, at any cost, immediately after dinner.

CHAPTER V

After all, it was something a little before ten o'clock when his car bumped over the ruts and holes in the road beyond Merchantsville, and he began to see the Mount Holly lights. Not so late, Craig reflected complacently, but that he could read and smoke for a comfortable hour in his uncle's library before going to bed.

"Hello—all right—I hear you!" he found himself shouting suddenly, rousing himself with violence. Somebody had hailed him from the side of the road. He slowed his car—stopped—a man in a chauffeur's uniform came running up to him.

"Hello, there—sorry to stop you, Mister," said this person, panting, "but we've got some sort of engine trouble. How far is it to Mount Holly?"

"About a mile. That's all right—take you in," Craig said, good-naturedly, remembering now that he had passed a handsome limousine stalled beside the road some few hundred feet back. Another man now came within the range of his lights: a tall, lean man in a handsome, foreign-looking fur coat—a European.

"You will take for me a message, that my friends shall not be incommoded?" asked this man, in an imperious yet courteous voice. Craig saw a young face, rather pale, with immense, deep flaming black eyes, and long, finely shaped features. He had seen this face before, he thought—where? Where? It was a strong

face, clean-shaven and thin, with some odd hint of womanliness about it. The speech had the rushing, daring fluency of the north of Europe. Russian, Craig thought, or perhaps German.

"Glad to," he said, cordially, his mind already busy seeking the explanation of this man's appearance here at this hour.

Instantly the other man's face lighted brilliantly, and he clasped Craig's left hand in both his own. More fluent, slightly incorrect English came in a glad rush. He was coming to see friends—old, old friends, in Mount Holly, he said. This good, hospitable gentleman would tell them that he was delayed? He had left the hotel in Philadelphia at eight—it was now almost ten o'clock.

"Let me take you, that'll be better," Craig suggested. "We can drop your man at the garage, and he can come for you later." He opened the door of the seat beside him; the stranger, pouring forth ecstatic blessings, came around the hood to join him. Who on earth in Mount Holly, Craig pondered meanwhile, who on earth——?

"I go to the Mademoiselles Collier," said his passenger, answering his thought.

"Ah-h-h!" said Craig. "But who the deuce *are* you?" he thought.

"You know them?" the other man asked, eagerly.

"Oh, very well! At least I know the older one," Craig amended honestly.

"I go to them," said the stranger, contentedly, "they are my mother's friend. We shall talk of music together!"

"They're very keen about music, I know," said Craig,

not knowing whether to be most amused, surprised, or generally confused at the position in which he found himself.

"Oh, certainly. Why not?" the foreigner said, very simply rousing himself from thought.

"They expect you, I suppose?" ventured Craig.

"Oh, certainly," the other said again. "I send them the telegram. 'I have your letter,' I say. 'I come!' But fancy to yourself, Monsieur, that I shall have this letter only yesterday. Assassins—that will not send it to me!"

He lapsed again into silence, and Craig reflected with some bewilderment upon the effect of such an arrival upon two young girls living alone. The whole thing was very odd: the hour, the man's youth and manner, and the fact that Miss Collier had said nothing this afternoon of expecting such a visitor.

The car turned into the town, slipped and crunched upon the hard-packed snow, turned out into Spy Street, and pushed its disproportionately big nose into Sugarhouse Lane. Both men got out, and Craig fumbled for the door in the brick wall.

This once opened, they saw that the little house was hospitably flooded with light. The porch door opened, golden radiance streamed forth, and as Craig and the stranger came up to the steps the former recognized Hilary, silhouetted in the stream of light, very charming and quaint in some prim little gown of black with white ruffles at her wrists and throat, and with her hands held out in welcome.

"Kronski!" she cried.

A great light broke in upon Craig's mind as he placed

the man; he wondered how he could have missed the likeness before. So Miss Collier's absurd faith in Kronski was justified, after all! Perhaps these musical creatures had some understanding among themselves.

He felt himself superfluous here; but he could not turn his back upon the little drama being enacted before him.

The violinist sprang to meet Hilary, and their conversation broke into such rapid and emotional French that Craig was unable to follow it. He heard their laughter, saw their tears, and could hardly recognize, in this glowing, impetuous woman, his uncle's demure little secretary.

Presently she could give Craig a smile of greeting; everything else was forgotten between them except that this was her home and Craig her guest. He must come in—oh, and he must meet Dora!

She drew Dora from a shy conversation with Kronski: Craig had a swift impression of somebody about Vi Vanderwort's height, with Vi's appealing look, only with a freshness and youth and beauty quite unknown to Vi.

He had only time to realize an extreme surprise that here, in commonplace little Mount Holly, this lovely creature could have lived all of her eighteen years, when Hilary took them all into the big room that had once been the kitchen but that was now evidently the parlour.

It was a long, high room filled with old-fashioned comfortable furniture, and with the open fireplace of white-washed bricks still occupying most of one end. An air-tight stove, hideous but effective, had been set

in the great chimney opening; Craig saw an old Dutch oven's door in the wall beside it.

About the walls sat several persons: an odd and heterogeneous lot, expectant country types with clean faces and clumsy boots for the most part, although there were one or two distinguished old faces among them. Hilary introduced them joyfully, explaining to Kronski that this was so rare a treat that she simply had to "call the neighbours in," like the woman in the nursery rhyme.

"No, but what rhyme is this?" demanded Kronski, stopping short in his round, and looking at her for an explanation.

In reply she supplied it quite simply.

"Why, don't you know

"Cross Patch, draw the latch,
Sit by the fire and spin!
Take a cup, and drink it up,
And call the neighbours in?"

she asked, gaily. The violinist appeared fascinated by the jingle.

"Cross, yes, but what is that patch?" he asked. "I must learn that 'call the neighbours in!'"

"This is our dear good neighbour Mrs. Latimer, and Miss Latimer," Hilary proceeded with her presentations, "and Jerry Latimer, and Doctor Stovall. And this is Madame Rider, who knows your country very well, Kronski, and Elsie Stout, whose mother is letting her stay up to meet you, because Elsie is going to be a musician one of these days—let him look at your fingers,

Elsie. Isn't that a musician's hand for
Madama Ghecchi, who is making good Ita

The little ceremony proceeded pleasant
Craig could only marvel as the awed and fla
try neighbours responded. Where had she ro
up, in Mount Holly, this old Italian lady an
Frenchwoman, old Doctor Stovall with his ma
mane of white hair, timid little Mrs. Stout tren
with pride in her fatherless daughter?

There was something homely, charming, European
about it, he decided, talking to fat, panting Tom Lester, whose temperamental little wife conducted the dramatic section of the local women's club, and memorized Alfred Noyes while rocking her heavy babies to sleep.

"Oh, this is such a rare treat, Mr. Spaulding!" said Ida Lester, eagerly and timidly, on his left. "The Collier girls are such wonderful girls . . ."

Truly he began to think that they were. Hilary had established Kronski near the piano, and now Dora came into the room with a violin in her hands. She extended it to the master without speaking: Kronski got to his feet, and laid the dark wood of the instrument against his cheek as if it had been a woman's hand, shutting his eyes. He whispered something infinitely tender, in French; Craig saw that the sisters and their guest were in a world of their own.

Immediately he returned it to Dora.

"Now you will play for me," he said. Craig watched the girl's flower-like face keenly; there was no affectation of hesitancy there. Hilary readily seated herself at the piano, and rippled the notes with the fingers of the adept. Crisply, exquisitely, the preliminary chords

pon the expectant air; she looked at shoulder, and Dora began to play.

had finished, the listening circle pattered ut Kronski merely looked annoyed at the n. Hilary played another prelude, and Dora, eks were blazing, picked up her bow again. oked at her beauty in amazement; her fair was somewhat loosened, and in the exquisite white- ss of her face the scarlet of lips and cheeks was almost spectacular. Her lips twitched as she played, and her babyish forehead wore a slight, anxious scowl.

At the finish it was Hilary who crashed the last chord and swept past her sister to the musician's side. Kronski was on his feet, he had come to the piano, her hand touched his arm.

"No, but tell me, Kronski!" she begged, breathless with tension.

"Tell you that you have here the divine thing, that is what this greedy sister wishes for you, is it?" Kronski said, smiling, to Dora. "When do you come to me for some real work—I am in my studio in January again, in Munich," he said. "You will come—when?"

"You'll teach her—yourself——!" Hilary stammered, trying to laugh. Craig saw that her lashes were wet with happy tears. "We'll sail in early summer," she told him, positively.

"Oh, Hilary!" Dora said, her eyes shining.

"And then you will begin to cry, and say that you never can do the hard things I make you do, and hate my old Von Mandescheid to whom I send you for the scales and exercises!" Kronski prophesied to Dora.

"Oh, no, I won't!" she said, happily. Kronski had the

Amati in his hands, now he raised the bow, and Hilary, with a reverent expression on her face, touched a chord on the piano.

"What have we here—what have we here?" the violinist said, softly, looking over her shoulder at the scattered music.

"Will you play for us?" the girl said.

"But why not?" Kronski asked her in return, arching his heavy eyebrows at the expectant circle. "You have worked hard, Mademoiselle," he added, watching her careless fingers.

"All my life!" she answered, flushing with pleasure.

"The Mama begins you when—at seven—at eight?"

"Oh, at four!"

His eyes gleamed.

"It should be so," he said, approvingly, "and one sees it. Ah, my darling!" he murmured in Russian, to the violin. "And how long did the little hands practise at four?" he asked, as he lightly drew forth a casual note or two that made Hilary's fingers turn cold with ecstasy. "What is this we have here? Wieniawski? The scherzo tarantelle—good! Shall we commence?"

There followed suddenly, like a scream in the listening silence, an introductory phrase so pure, so flashing and brilliant that Hilary quite palpably winced, and her hands shook as they began the accompaniment. Dora, even in the middle of a whispered sentence to Craig, was struck dumb, he saw her soft little mouth half-open in utter rapture, her eyes were fixed upon Kronski, she seemed transported instantly to another world. Craig felt, himself, that he could glimpse now,

for the first time in his life, the full beauty of the instrument for which men had longed, and toiled, suffered and died, for a thousand years. Beauty, stupendous and immortal, was shut into that narrow box of polished wood, and at Konrad's touch it awoke again: the beauty of all music, all power, all passion flooded the little room, and brimmed in it like molten gold.

Dora had performed charmingly; but this did not seem a performance. The violin seemed a living thing, sobbing, chuckling, murmuring, complaining; Kronski and Hilary were but shadows; priests at the altar. Craig had an almost uncomfortable sense of being actually carried away, when they abruptly stopped, and he saw Hilary laughing and wiping her eyes, and Konrad filling his lungs with a great breath, like a boy winded by a run. Whatever they said, a few brief sentences flung almost breathlessly at each other, he missed, because they spoke in French. Immediately they were off again, and the magic was repeated.

"Ah, he's a great master!" little Dora said, solemnly. Craig thought her positive little statement rather amusing and touching. "Sis—the Dvorak!" she pleaded, aloud.

"You shall have it!" Konrad agreed, with a military bow.

The circle listened, marvelled, applauded. Craig, and Dora, sitting next to him, led the applause. But to Craig an odd enchantment, a bewildered sense of having been here in this odd, warm, cluttered room, and in this strangely assorted, strangely stimulating company before, was making even Kronski and the Amati seem of secondary importance. He thought confusedly

that he liked these people; liked the very homeliness and simplicity of the whole thing, and wanted them to like him. There was a refreshing heartiness and honesty about it all——

And this young girl next to him, with her enthusiasms, her artlessness, her brown eyes and slender little shabby figure, was strangely, irresistibly appealing. There were cadences in her slightly husky young voice that he had never heard in a woman's voice before. She charmed him, she was at once so old and so young; he wanted to laugh at and cry at her confidences. Somehow it wrung his heart when she looked at him gravely, at Kronski's third selection, and said seriously: "Vieuxtemps, I *think*. Is it? Anyway," she whispered, solemnly, "you can hear that Hilary's improvising the accompaniment!"

Craig felt ignorant, young, alien, in this atmosphere, and he rather liked the feeling. In his own set he had been conscious for many years of a certain sense of superiority. Here, despite the absurdities, the Stout child and her pale mother, Tom Lester and his ready-tied tie, old Stovall and the high-busted, panting Italian woman, there was some quality that made him oddly desirous to shine.

After the music they were informal. Elsie Stout played "Narcissus" for Kronski, the little Frenchwoman recited something in her mother tongue about "le lendemain." Kronski went back to the nursery rhyme; what was that about the neighbours, now?

Refreshments were now being served; and if Craig had had any wonder left, it might have been expended upon what Hilary had provided for her guests. Many of these, with the instinctive delicacy of the simple, had

by this time expressed their appreciation and departed. The Latimers and the Lesters and the Stouts had gone, but the old doctor and the French and Italian women remained.

On the table, frankly drawn forth from the wall and cleared for the feast, were sardines and soda crackers, preserved plums and a large pot of tea, pickles and butter, rye bread, and ginger-snaps. Craig's heart for some reason suffered a wrench of acute pity when he saw added to these a blue bowl of cold potatoes. Were they as poor as that?

Kronski, however, apparently saw nothing amiss. He drank his hot weak tea sugared, from a long tumbler, and when they had eaten the sardines, dipped his potatoes in the rich oil in the tin with many an appreciative word. And he could not say enough, when the time came, about the ginger-snaps.

What were they, these hot little cakes? Ginger, eh? From the South Sea Islands, eh? But where did one get these cakes?

"From any grocery," Hilary assured him, laughing. He looked at her with pathetic faith.

"No, but I go into these groceries, why do I not see them?" he demanded. He allowed her to bring in from the kitchen all that were left in the bag, and stowed them in the pocket of his fur coat when the time came to go. It was one o'clock. "But I will sleep all day to-morrow," he told them, reassuringly. "And then, in the evening, I shall play for you and the Butterfly!"

Craig took Madama Ghecchi home, and reached his own rooms in a state of mental confusion and bewilderment. At one moment he felt only amusement; what

an evening! with its heated faces and jumbled chairs, the whine of the violin, the dominant richness of Kronski's voice. He remembered himself eating with gusto—somehow everything had tasted very well.

The predominant impression was not flattering to his late company: this Kronski must be no more than a peasant, when all was said and done. And the girls—poor little unevenly developed, curiously handicapped creatures! Would they really follow up the family gift, and make professional musicians of themselves some day? The little one was certainly beautiful. A surer cut to wealth and fame for her would be through the moving picture world. He must not, Craig decided, become entangled with these girls; they were too simple, too fine.

CHAPTER VI

The morning came to the man and to the Collier girls with a mood of cold awakening. Craig, who had eagerly promised Dora last night that he would certainly attend the Kronski concert to-night in Philadelphia, found himself inclined to do nothing of the kind. The evening party seemed only a flurried memory, he could not account for what he had said, and felt, and done during those three feverish hours; he disliked the idea of meeting Miss Collier in the office this morning, and thought with suddenly reddening cheeks that Tom Lester might at this moment be telling his associates in the village dry goods store of the good company Craig Spaulding could be when he "got started."

Dora awakened headachy and depressed. Her morning would be spent in sweeping the demoralized living room and in washing a pyramid of sticky plates. Cigar and cigarette ashes were everywhere, and scented everything; there was no butter for breakfast, they had used the last scrap for the impromptu party. She remarked pettishly that she did not care what she wore to the concert; she did not care much about the old concert, anyway; she was sick of living, some people got everything, and some people drudged along all their lives and starved and pinched and scraped and were laughed at for their trouble!

Hilary, for once, found no soothing answers for

these familiar complaints. She looked pale, and seemed absent-minded and worried, entirely unlike herself. The glorious evening had left her, Dora knew, in high spirits, and while they were going to bed she had exulted in the memory of it.

"But Butterfly, sweetheart," she had said to Dora, when, warm and happy and confident, Dora was standing beside her brushing her thick, soft hair, "don't you realize that all our lives are going to be like that? That's the way musicians are—that's the way really great people are—not little snobs like Maude Underwood and Gertrude Morrill!"

But when the room was darkened, and Dora was asleep, Hilary had lain awake, remembering every instant between ten o'clock and one, and suddenly discomfort had touched her; a rapidly deepening discomfort that had presently turned to an active shame. She had sat up straight in bed, unable to bear the suffocating weight of it, and steadily the whole enormity of her humiliation had developed before her.

What had she said—what had she said—parting with Craig Spaulding at the front door? Hilary's face burned, she knew only too well what she had said.

Craig, in his finished manner, had thanked her for the enjoyable evening. It had been one of real delight to him, as she must surely realize.

And, elated with triumph and the exhilaration of the successful event, Hilary had answered, with a sudden air of intimacy—but what had she answered? Sick with self-contempt, she tried to remember the exact words.

Well, perhaps they had not been so bad, after all; they had all been laughing and excited, and the rooms

got very hot, and nobody had been in a critical mood. Yet Hilary wished passionately, in the long, restless hours of this wretched night, that she had never heard of Craig Spaulding, or of Kronski, either, and that the evening had been a dead failure rather than that she should have this school-girlish stupidity of hers to remember!

"It wasn't anything, he knew I just felt friendly—if I had said it with everyone listening, it would have been perfectly simple!" she told herself. After all, he had shown friendship enough to come to see them—that was something——

"Probably he didn't hear me. Probably he never gave it another thought——!

"Oh, I can't bear it!" whispered Hilary, writhing alone in the dark night. "Oh, what possessed me! What on earth can he think of me? And how on earth can I ever go down to the office and face him tomorrow!"

Dora and Kronski had gone down the steps, into the cold midnight darkness; she and Craig had been in the doorway. Again she reviewed the whole episode: his courteous farewells, her fatuous gush of absurdities in answer! What must he think?

What had he answered? It seemed to Hilary that she recalled a surprised and chilled expression on his face. Her heart was sick within her; and the long night was only a succession of restless dozes, wretched awakenings, and miserable remembering all over again.

It was dreadful to find Dora so unreasonable in the morning. Out of doors there was hard, freezing weather; the very disorder of the backyards was frozen into

marble firmness, garbage-tins were frozen; harsh sunlight that seemed without warmth struck coldly upon the steaming manure-pile outside of the Fosters' shabby old stable. A coloured woman was gossiping with the man who was supposed to be cleaning the Fosters' porch.

Hilary sipped her coffee in silence; it seemed impossible that this forbidding, weary morning could usher in the long-awaited day of the Kronski concert. That Kronski should rush from his Philadelphia hotel to seek herself and Dora out, that Dora should play for him, and he for them, that he should promise to teach her himself, all this would have seemed a miracle of happiness only yesterday! But as it was Hilary found herself strangely apathetic toward Kronski; could she have blotted from existence those last unbearable words between herself and Craig, she would gladly have lost, with them, all the other events of the evening.

"I'll be home at noon, anyway, Butterfly. And don't kill yourself with the dishes and things. We can do them to-morrow if we have to. Get in your practice, dear, won't you?"

"I don't want to practise!" said Dora, drearily.

"Oh, darling, you must. Think what an incentive you have now. Kronski to teach you—think of it!"

"Yes, I know," Dora muttered, lifelessly. "I'm just sick of hearing how wonderful it's all going to be!" she added, rebelliously. "I'd like it to *begin!*"

"Well, didn't it? Didn't something begin last night?" Hilary asked, resolutely cheerful, although with a spasmodic thought at the same instant that last night had been a miserable failure.

"Gertrude Morrill—what does *she* know about music

—she never practised an hour in her life!" burst out Butterfly, bitterly. "And how does *she* go to the concert? Oh, in Grandpa s car, of course! They'll start about four, and have dinner at the Bellevue-Stratford and probably have the best seats——!"

Hilary rose from her place sighed, and placed her cup and plate among the heaped plates at the sink. She put away the sugar-bowl, filled both kettles with water to heat for the dishes, and put on her shabby coat. Dora watched her furtively. The little sister's heart was aching; she didn't want Hilary to go away in this depressed mood. But Dora was exhausted with excitement, fatigue, and the taste of a new and poisonous cup touched for the first time to her lips.

She was silent, and kept her bright head sullenly bent as Hilary kissed the crown of her hair for goodbye. She was alone.

The fresh cold air outside braced Hilary hearteningly; so much so that she had not reached Spy Street before she wished that she had urged Butterfly to take a brisk turn about the block before beginning the morning's drudgery. But just some such vague resentment and fundamental discouragement as had kept Dora silent held her now, and she walked on to the office without interruption.

Fortune was with her. Old Kraut was there, and Craig was not. The mail came in, and when Craig did finally appear, at about ten o'clock, she could approach him quite naturally.

"Mr. Spaulding, is your uncle back yet? I think this is very important. That entire shipment to the Barbadoes man . . ."

Kraut pushed his old spectacles up on his bald forehead; Craig stood beside Hilary reading the unwelcome letter; he formed his lips for a whistle.

"Yes, my uncle's home. That's bad, isn't it? I'll get in touch with him, I believe he is coming down later. I may have to go into New York and see the Lamport-Holt people about that."

Hilary could sit down at her desk again, her heart quiet for the first time in some hours. She had seen him, and shown him a perfectly cool, dispassionate front. Later, he said to her suddenly:

"Tired out, at your house, after last night?"

"Well, with to-night's dissipation still to come . . ." she returned, composedly. She picked up her telephone.

"She certainly called me Craig last night, but I don't believe she knows it!" Craig thought, in relief. "I may have been getting a little too friendly here. I'll stop it! I won't be able to get to that concert to-night, I'm sorry to say," he added, aloud.

"Too bad!" Hilary commented, evenly. Her heart sank. In spite of her utmost effort to be sane she had been sitting here thinking how wonderful it would be if he suddenly decided to attend the concert, and to drive Dora and herself in to Philadelphia for dinner before it and if afterward they went to his dressing room and saw Kronski . . .

The dream died, and Hilary went soberly home over the cold, dirty snow at noon, and helped Dora with the last of the dishes, and improvised a luncheon of toasted rye bread, eggs, and sardines, and some softening gingersnaps left on a plate.

Then it was time to dress for the concert, but some-

how the life and sparkle had gone out of the whole thing. The prospect of two quietly dressed sisters going in to town at two o'clock and having an hour or two to shop sedately before eating a mild little dinner somewhere, and attending a violin concert, had strangely lost its charm. Hilary had always loved little expeditions with Dora; the quietest of them had always possessed for her a certain delight. Just to sit in the train was exciting; just to say "See, Butterfly, isn't that an adorable baby in that backyard?" or, "Dora, you can't remember, but I can, when people used to stand in the streets and stare up at aëroplanes as if they were black magic!"

To-day she felt jaded, oddly discontented and soul-weary. Everyone else in the world was having a nicer time than the Colliers; but the Colliers were so simple that they deceived themselves into thinking that they were unusually destined—unusually fortunate!

This mood was not unknown to Dora, but finding it reflected in herself alarmed Hilary. This would not do! She must somehow redeem this forlorn expedition; it *was* delightful, it *was* a great occasion!

She conscientiously tried. She admired Dora in her pressed old black velvet, she laughed cheerfully when they had to run for their train, she said that they would be wildly extravagant and have a really fine dinner somewhere.

But it all fell flat. Everything was an anticlimax, after last night. In spite of herself a little conviction of disappointment, of being unjustly treated, would creep into her heart. Even before the concert she began feverishly to wish that the whole thing was over, and that she and Dora were home again, and that it

was a peaceful, commonplace Sunday morning, with the world lost to them, and they lost to the world. Life wasn't for ever, anyway.

Their seats, in the big hall, were surprisingly good, and the music was glorious. Kronski played to a full house, and seemed once more the remote celebrity that he had been to them at this time yesterday. Dora and Hilary, after some rather heated debate, in which neither knew exactly what she wished to do, went in to congratulate him afterward, and found him cordial and kind even among a push of other enthusiastic admirers.

"You will be doing this some day—if you are a good Butterfly and work hard!" Dora had to remember, as a special personal word from the lion of the hour, and to Hilary, Kronski said confidentially: "You look at all this, in your good, motherly heart, and you say it is all nonsense, and is it not so? 'Take a cup and drink it up and call the neighbours to come in!' That's better, eh?"

After this the circling crowd somewhat pushed them aside, and they stood irresolute and troubled, smiling automatically as they watched him, not knowing quite what to do. Then Hilary said suddenly in a low tone:

"I think we had better slip away. So many people . . . Don't you think we had better?"

And Dora, discontentedly, and with a hint of moisture in her eyes, answered desolately:

"Yes, I guess so."

It was all over. They had seen Kronski, heard him not only in public but in private; made of him a warm friend, and won from him all that their mother and father could ever have hoped for Dora. And yet there

was a bitter disappointment about it all that made it harder than ever for Dora to work patiently and steadily and that marked even for sober and sensible Hilary a certain turning point in her life.

She began to long to get away; to leave this petty environment of Underwoods and Spauldings and Morrills. She imagined Dora and herself in some clean little pension abroad, studying, working, planning, everything in the world to each other once more!

Craig had been different since the evening party in Sugarhouse Lane. She saw it, and felt it keenly, and met it with a change on her own part. He should not think that she was entirely a sentimental idiot. She had had a moment of weakness, never to be remembered without blazing cheeks and a quickened heart, but it was over now. She was Miss Collier, his uncle's secretary, who planned to take her sister abroad for musical work in the fall.

About a week after the party Craig told her, casually and in Kraut's presence, that he had seen Kronski again. Mrs. Dwyer had given him an evening reception after his last New York concert; Kronski had been sailing in the morning. Craig did not tell her that the young violinist, with his shock of black hair, and his black eye-glass ribbon, and the tiny coloured emblem of his foreign decoration in his buttonhole, had been a surprisingly imposing, almost a forbidding, figure, in the Dwyers' elaborately equipped music-room. He, Craig, had found him impressive, oddly restored by his very ungraciousness to that pedestal upon which he had originally placed him. There was nothing of the genial peasant in Kronski seen thus; Mrs. Dwyer

indeed had pronounced him to be disobliging and conceited, and with some truth. But Craig could forgive the musician for showing his worst side in that particular atmosphere!

"Some of us, the Vanderworts and the Pickerings, saw him off on the *Aquitania* the next morning," Craig told Hilary. The girl felt a bitter resentment seize her. What was the matter with her in these days? —she asked herself, impatiently. What was it to her, if some idle rich people went laughing and chattering to the big liner, to wave good-bye to Konrad Kronski? They had always been doing these pretty, agreeable things, and they always would. Why should it so suddenly begin to prick Hilary Collier?

Nevertheless, the pain persisted, and against her own better judgment she found herself telling Dora about it that evening.

"H'm!" Dora commented, compressing her lips as she tightened an E string. They went through a duet conscientiously; stopping dutifully to repeat and repeat and repeat a troublesome passage. Then Dora added suddenly: "We do the work, and introduce him to Craig Spaulding, and then these Dwyers who don't know Strauss from jazz take him up and make much of him!"

Hilary felt a pang of compunction. The thought had been pricking her all day; but might she not have been generous enough to spare Dora? The shadow on the lovely little face haunted her, and during the next few days, as she went to and fro, she discovered new heights of courage and self-denial in herself, and rose to them heroically.

"I have gotten a long way," Hilary reminded herself bravely, "since those terrible days seven years ago, when Father died. We are both well, and out of debt, and we have saved money for study, as I told him we would. And we love each other, and we do have lots of fun working out verbs with Madama Ghecchi, and improvising, and everything! I used to pray in those days, and dedicate myself to what I had planned to do, and ask God to help me do it. And now I must make a fresh start, and plan again, and pray more than I do.

"And first of all," she reminded herself, more than once, walking through the shabby old streets in the heavy January weather, "first of all, I must put this nonsense about Craig Spaulding out of my head! Even supposing that he did love me, I couldn't marry him with the idea that I could help Butterfly that way! Every marriage is a whole job by itself, and I should have a pretty hard time keeping up with those friends of his, and not making stupid mistakes! And what would Butterfly do? What could she do, except marry some miserable young spendthrift like Victor Morrill——

"Besides, it's all so silly! Craig Spaulding doesn't ever think of me—he's in love with that pretty little Mrs. Vanderwort, if he is with anybody. So now that's settled, and I know that if I do my share God will find me the right place in life, and help me to become a good, busy, useful, happy woman!"

CHAPTER VII

BUT spring began to come to Mount Holly, coquettishly and slowly, as is the fashion of spring in New Jersey; but with an infinite sweetness and graciousness, and with spring several elements as cold as the winter winds, and as hard as the packed snows, began to soften and to melt in several human hearts.

One of these hearts was Violet Vanderwort's. She drew Craig Spaulding aside, at a certain February dinner, and said to him very softly, with her eyes dropped to the little hand she laid on his forearm:

"Craig. I don't want to see too much of you now for awhile. You and I have got to go different places, and not even think about each other!"

"What have I done, Vi?" Craig asked, after a pause.

"You?" She flashed him a look, looked down again. "No," she said, in a low voice, "but it's because I don't want people to say that it's on your account that I'm leaving Reggy, Craig."

"You really are, Vi?" he said, distressed. This was his first definite intimation of it.

"Oh, yes, I really am! It can't be done, Craig," she said with a long, tired sigh. "And I—I like you too much. I don't want you mixed into this mess! It's all so putrid. Time enough for that, later!"

Well, it was acting, of course. Vi was always acting. But to Craig it was decidedly disquieting, nonetheless.

He liked Reggy Vanderwort; he always had. He felt that Reggy had been the loser by his marriage; Vi was a beautiful and seductive little thing, of course, but she was a bloodless little thing, too. She had airily told quite a group of them, just before her marriage, that Reggy's enthusiasm for his sister's baby annoyed her.

"He can take it out on Kate's baby!" she had said, laughing. And two years or more after her marriage, when Craig, seriously distressed at the deepening breach between the young Vanderworts, had taken a close friend's brotherly right to hint to her that Reggy was the sort of man tightest held by nursery claims, Vi had quite good-naturedly repudiated the suggestion again.

"Oh, br-r-r! the whole idea is perfectly repulsive to me!" she had assured him, with a shudder. "You're quite right, Craig. Reggy would be absolutely nutty with joy. But excuse me. I don't see that it's my duty to gratify Reggy to that extent. Some day, maybe. . . . Of course, he'd like nothing better than five little boys in a row! Men are like that."

Men are like that. She had said it scornfully, but Craig had thought of it since more than once. Five little boys in a row; but Violet would not bear them for Reggy, nor for any other man. He thought this to-night, even while her fragrant little anemic person was close beside him, and her soft little hand on his arm. Violet, he thought, was about twenty-four; but there was no freshness, no youth and vigour and bloom, left in her. The exquisitely flawless face, under its visible films of powder, rouge, and paste, the lips stiff with brilliant paint, the bright hair scalloped into curves of marble firmness, the eye lashes lightly freighted with

some black oil, their surrounding sockets touched with faint lavender shadows—it was all like something machine-made, finished, dressed in laces and gold brocades, hung with sparkling jewels, and sent forth to be admired.

And the woman's soul within; that was the same. She had all the little tricks of intelligence; quotations, foreign phrases, bored little superiorities, witty little asides. She had a tenacious instinct for her own preservation; anything that would mar that skin, or that metallic hair, or those boneless little hands she could perceive with the lightning swiftness of the tiger. She could avert the menace, whatever it might be, with almost unbelievable ingenuity and skill. She had the knowledge of charm; she could seem sweet, wistful, injured, loving. With a sort of childish directness she could plead with him to "be nice to Vi," or with an air of pure and deeply wounded womanly goodness she could appeal: "I only want to get out of it, Craig. My God, how all the people I know sicken me with their putrid lies and compliments and extravagances and flattery! I'm not like that, Craig. There's a real me——"

He knew it all so well! He had played the little game with her gallantly, for years.

But now she was not playing. She would really divorce Reggy, and she was certainly talking to-night as if she meant to put Craig in his place.

Craig recoiled from the prospect, genuinely appalled. He was not in love with Violet, nor with any one. He hated the thought of the sweetness, the gentleness, the cleverness she would show toward him if she had really

set her heart upon marrying him. He hated the anticipation of their friends' hearty coöperation with her in her plan. Their hints, their jokes, their inferences and implications would manage the whole matter as soon as she was free. Vi was infernally clever, there was danger in merely seeing her, and if he went with his own crowd at all, he must inevitably see her.

All this went through his mind as she murmured her little considerate explanation. When he could speak, he said:

"I'll beat it down to Mount Holly again, and dig in for the rest of the season. My uncle isn't well, there's a lot I ought to do there, anyway. Don't worry, Vi, I don't think any one is going to talk. But be pretty sure, dear, that you aren't making a mistake?"

"About—liking you, trusting you, Craig?" she asked, innocently wondering in tone.

"No, old thing. About—well, Reggy's going to have enough money to burn a wet dog with some day, you know! Can't stick it? A couple of nice little kids. . . ?"

"Do I look like the sort of woman who's willing to put up with everything for the sake of a couple of little crying babies?" she demanded, passionately. "Since that day of the big game, when you played quarter, and I went with Reggy, and he asked me to marry him, I've known that it wasn't *Reggy!*"

Reggy was the nearest thing to being actually weak-minded that Craig knew among his acquaintances; more than the rest of them Reggy was inane, weak, spoiled, stupid, selfish. Reggy sometimes talked of his horses, but preferred the subject of alcoholic liquors.

Craig's group was lenient and inactive enough, but even in Craig's group Reggy was regarded with a mixture of contempt and conscious lenience.

"Too bad!" he commented, sighing.

"How you men stick together!" Vi said, sharply.

"Cross even with me?" he asked her, in a tone that brought back her equilibrium. She gave him a penitent smile, and began to tell him of the arrangement between herself and Reggy, and that his sister Kate Pierce had suggested that she, Violet, return to the Vanderwort family some of the portraits that, at marriage, had come to her as Reggy's wife!

"Let them buy them back if they want them!" Violet said, resentfully. "I don't want the old things!"

He left her side, later in the evening, profoundly thoughtful. In a few days or weeks the newest fashionable divorce would have its hour of notoriety. At that moment a dozen voices would say in unison: "It's Craig Spaulding!"

Craig was not conceited; his was an unusually well-balanced head. But he must have been a fool indeed not to know that he was good-looking, rich, conspicuously desirable in every way that would appeal to Violet. She had wanted wealth and a name the first time. Now she wanted a man, a man that other women liked and would envy her, and to whose home other men wanted to come. She wanted to entertain, to draw the interesting people of the great city about her; not to be merely pitied by the world, and coaxed by Reggy's family into keeping him out of too-notorious escapades.

"Lord—Lord, this is a funny mix-up!" Craig thought, moving through the days in the Mount Holly

office, and spending his evenings decorously in his uncle's library. His aunt would ask him a few meaningless questions at dinner; the salad would be passed, the ice passed, with a few slices already cut, to encourage him. The coffee, in unpleasant little gold cups, was served in the library. The big onyx clock above the heavy streaked marble mantel would strike the half-hour after eight. Craig, in a deep leather chair, read his novel fitfully, looking off it at the fire, and thinking apprehensively of Violet Vanderwort.

CHAPTER VIII

Spring came on; March was bright with clearing skies and glorious sweeping winds that were not too cold. The snow drew into patches under the lilacs and the carefully ranged conifers in front yards; vanished entirely. Children's voices began to ring out in the lengthening twilight again; and one day Hilary Collier called his attention to a real sign of the breaking season.

He had walked out the Merchantsville road one Saturday afternoon, over bare brown roads and whipped fields, breathing deep of the wild and stirring airs. There was an old cut through here, somewhere near the forlorn and deserted brown porches and fences of the Amusement Park, and past an old quarry. Craig struck into the woods, trying to find it.

He had almost reached the oyster shell road into Rancocas when he came upon Hilary and Dora Collier, muddy, rosy, breathless, and fresh as the sweet open day itself. They had been gathering willow branches; they showed him eagerly that the gray velvet tips were almost visible on the bare whips already.

"And listen——!" said Hilary, lightly touching his arm in her eagerness. She and Dora, eyes serious, inclined their heads toward the woods, and were still. Craig, bewildered, followed their example.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Listen!" directed Hilary.

This time he heard it: the brave, insistent shrilling of frogs somewhere unseen.

"The peepers!" Hilary announced, triumphantly. "Doesn't that sound like spring? The darlings! Listen——"

To Craig it was very pleasant to stand there, warmed by his brisk walk, and watching these two radiant girls in their shabby tramping clothes, with the hair blown about under their plain little soft hats, and their faces rosy. He thought he had never seen such exquisite colour as glowed in both faces. On their fine skins the living bloom palpitated delicately, as if the young blood were racing beneath it; he liked the careless way in which they gathered up their loosened hair for the walk home, and for the first time their sisterhood impressed him oddly; it was sweet to see sisters so interested, so affectionate, toward each other.

They walked together to Sugarhouse Lane; Hilary did not ask him to come farther, and Craig walked on with an odd sense of being snubbed. A week later he deliberately went to call.

After that he went two or three times a week; he became their dear and privileged friend, he laughed at all their momentous problems, heard all their debates, advised them, and asked their advice in turn. When Hilary, in a burst of economical madness, tried to bake her own bread with a patent mixer, he and Dora watched the result anxiously. When young Mrs. Potter was ill, and the Collier girls took in her baby for three nights, he shared with them the responsibility of the croupy Buster, and sat smoking contentedly beside the air-tight stove, watching Hilary in the rocker op-

posite, with a look of content upon her fine face, and the baby luxuriously sprawled in sleep on the skirt of the little blue corduroy.

If Dora was restless about her practice—to Craig she seemed the merest infant—he reproached her in brotherly fashion. Come, now, she must be good—she didn't want to disappoint her sister, did she?

The little house in Sugarhouse Lane, its microscopic ménage, the hours of talk, of music, of merry little meals in the tiny kitchen, came to seem, to Craig, the sweetest part of his life. Hilary with her responsiveness, her keenness, her courage and goodness, he thought the finest woman he had ever known. He tried her by a hundred tests, and found her wanting nowhere. She was better educated, even now, than Vi would ever be, she was cleverer, she had the old-fashioned quality of goodness. And Butterfly, the adorable child of moods, the little girl who was in so many ways a woman, too, Butterfly he loved almost as well. Indeed, he told himself, he loved them both, they were extraordinary creatures, they had brought into his life a sweetness and simplicity and purity that he had never known before.

And, as the spring deepened, and the lilacs budded and the dogwood opened its ivory leaves, the yearly miracle seemed to him to be, for the first time, a part of himself. These languid airs, these lingering tender days, these blue morning skies and the faraway crowing of cocks were all deliciously blended into the astonishing thought that Hilary Collier might some day be his wife.

He had given her no hint; but he knew that she must suspect it. The friendliness of their mere "Good-morning!" in the office, the light in her eyes, the smiling

obedience with which the russet head bent over his slightest commission, betrayed her a dozen times a day. He liked everything about her: the strong, full young hand with its fresh smooth cuff; the fresh, round, firm throat that rose from her plain frilled collar; her splendid voice that was always just a shade husky; her shining teeth when she laughed. It would be wonderful to have these two devoted little sisters under his care: to fulfill Dora's destiny on a scale that Hilary had never dreamed, and to share with Hilary the pride and glory of Dora's career.

One balmy April evening, when there was a yellow sunset after long warm rains, he walked home with her, and she chanced to speak of the autumn, and of her trip, with Dora, to the old world.

They stopped at the gate.

"Hilary," Craig said, with his kindly smile, his keen gray eyes upon her with an admiring appreciation of the curve of the old garden doorway that framed her, and the fragrant new greenness of the garden beyond, "you know that I hope to have something to say about that, don't you?"

She raised her honest blue eyes, and in the streams of the tender April sunset her whole face grew radiant under his look.

The next instant Dora joined them, a buoyant and giddy Dora in these happy days when Craig's friendship was bringing so new and so thrilling an element into their lives.

Dora's hands were full of fragrant wild violets; in her cheeks the colour of rose-petals bloomed.

"Craig, you know what you said?" she cried. "About

my trying the surgeon's tape about my wrist, on the Pagani Caprice? Well, I tried it, and it was wonderful! Wait until you hear me play it!"

"I thought I was mean, and didn't know what I was talking about!" Craig teased her. He loved the change in her bright face; the honest flush, the embarrassment that fell over her gipsy mood like a veil. What a little girl she was!

"Craig," she said, courageously, "I'm—I'm sorry. Will you—will you forgive me?"

"Why, you little goose!" he said, tenderly, touched by her sweet and childish humility, "you don't think I minded?"

Hilary had gone on, smiling, into the house. He and Dora were alone at the gate. He found himself looking at her in bewilderment, as she talked, as if he had never seen her before; as if this glowing girl, over whose warm young hand his own hand lay forgivingly, was an entire stranger. Yesterday she had just been little Butterfly, chattering and confiding and impetuous and eager. Now there was something oddly new about the red mouth, and the brown eyes, and the bright soft masses of hair with the sunset streaming on them. Dora—was this Dora——?

He began to realize there was something peculiar and new in his feeling for Dora, and that she was strangely important in his new plans. They must take great care of Dora, she was an extraordinary child. She was, in fact, the most remarkable child he had ever known.

She must never marry; that was flat. It was horrible to think of the average man, in fact of even an exceptionally good man, as being entrusted with Dora.

Perish the thought! The chances of her being misunderstood—abused—unhappy, were too terribly probable. Delicate little exquisite body—trusting brown eyes—mouth so ready to curve for either laughter or tears——

Craig's aunt was giving a dinner that night, but he was poor company. He stared absently ahead of him, scowling faintly, biting his lip. Horrible! To have Dora unhappy—to have the little Butterfly crushed by some unheeding, sensual brute——

Men would fall in love with her, too; all sorts of men. He thought of her swift, touching humility when she had fancied that he was angry with her. Somehow he liked to remember it, to let his thoughts dwell upon it.

The next day he could not wait to see the Colliers; and because he had been thinking about them so much, and was so conscious of a change in his feeling for them, it seemed odd to him to find them so placidly unstirred. It was a Sunday, a sweet and fragrant Sunday full of warm breezes and the deep shadows of new foliage upon new grass. They had been to church, but they were back, and in household ginghams now, and Hilary's unflagging energy had decreed that this was the day to carry out some long-cherished plans for the front garden.

It was a small garden, but delightfully sheltered by the old brick wall on two sides, and by the house that had been the "Carolan's kitchen," and the side wall of the big Carolan mansion on the others. There were two or three magnificent trees in it, trees now in rich leaf, and fluttering in the morning sunlight with birds; there was an enormous cherry tree, a giant elm, a plum tree just losing its snowy bloom, and several

stocky old lilacs that showed fragrant masses of lavender and white blossom between their clean, heart-shaped leaves.

Hilary directed the raking, digging, hauling. Her idea was to clean the old brick path, obliterated for a generation, and to establish a certain old table under the elm where she and Dora might have many a summer breakfast and supper. The spring morning was warm, Craig's face grew wet as he worked, and Dora's soft, straight, fly-away locks clung to her white forehead.

The earth was wet and soft from recent rains, weeds yielded easily, and presently a great heap of them lay wilting fragrantly in the sunshine, and Hilary's rake brought order and beauty under the elm. The damp earth, neatly scored by the rake's teeth, dried in a pale brown crust over the furrows, the sprawling lilacs were tied into sheaves, and sunshine penetrated delicately into mossy corners that had been hidden by the rank false shoots of the roses.

Dora went into the kitchen, and presently Craig stood below her at the front door, drinking eagerly from a tin dipper of cold water. Hilary, panting, waited in the sun-flecked path, and surveyed them contentedly.

"Now when the vines fall into place," she summarized, "and the lilacs don't look so stiff, and when we get that old blue tablecloth washed, Butterfly, and the chair mended—I'll see old Diggs about that at the factory to-morrow—then I think it'll be simply *adorable*."

"And for afternoon tea!" exulted Dora, sucking a pricked finger. "When the shadows begin to fall——"

Craig, refreshed, sat down on the doorstep, panting, and Dora tenderly trickled the remainder of the water into a window box. The tussle with tough old fibrous vines and heavy roots had left the man comfortably tired; he was as enthusiastic as the girls over the picture of those summer breakfasts here in the delicate shadows of mellowed old wall and towering trees. He wondered, flexing a sore hand thoughtfully, how many other women, possessing these old gardens, had seen in them similar possibilities.

"How about washing our hands, and lunch?" he suggested, hopefully.

"What I was thinking was," Hilary answered, readily, "that it's one o'clock now. Now suppose you go home to your lunch, and we'll have something to eat, and clean up, and Butterfly can get in her practice—one hour, anyway. And then you come back, at about four, and we can have a drive, and then our first supper here—wouldn't that be fun?"

Craig agreed to the plan contentedly; it was characteristic of these young creatures that they brimmed with plans. If it were only to persuade the mother of some unknown village child into a visit to the doctor, they had a fashion of interesting him and involving him profoundly.

Their poverty shamed him, and touched him, over and over again. The few dollars that would have meant a taxicab, a telegram, an extra railway fare, they simply did not have. Upon the rare occasions of their going into Philadelphia they might return late if they liked; but the possibility of a night in a hotel apparently never occurred to them. He winced when Hilary told

him of a long-ago day when she had lost her purse in the Quaker City.

"It was five years ago," she recounted, cheerfully, "Butterfly was only thirteen. And we had not had our lunch, we were waiting to see a doctor about her arm—they had thought she must have it x-rayed. But think of it—almost seven dollars! Oh, and we were so hungry! We walked to the ferry, and waited until we saw some Mount Holly people, and borrowed seventy cents, and came home. And so we didn't have our supper until nine—do you remember, Butterfly?"

"I remember we drank about two quarts of hot chocolate," mused Butterfly, her eyes smiling.

Craig did not smile. He thought of this girl of eighteen, guiding the littler girl home with the courage that seemed to be part of her, lighting the dark, wintry house, mixing chocolate, cutting bread, and feasting at last, after the long, tiring day, and he could not smile. It was not fair! It was not fair that he, a strong, big man, could in her place have gone into half-a-dozen New York or Philadelphia banks or hotels, identified himself, leisurely cashed a check for one hundred or one thousand dollars, and turned away with no more concern than that the incident had been a stupid delay. Somebody ought to look out for little girls like this; he wondered what any one of the big associations, the Red Cross, or the Y.W.C.A., would have done for these little gentlewomen in distress? But of course they could not have helped, here. It would be too easy for impostors to tell such a tale as this. . . .

The warm spring days went on. And with every one of them he felt himself drawn more and more away

from the old life he had known in the city, and closer and closer to these new influences. He said to himself that even now it would be simple enough to break the Mount Holly ties, yet day after day he felt himself hungering for a sight of the two sisters, for their little budget of news, for his share of their lives. And day after day the dinners with the Dwyers and even with his own dignified and intelligent mother and father, in New York, became less interesting, less vital; he found himself, in the very middle of a formal dinner, or seated behind some perfumed and bare-shouldered woman at the play, lost in a dream of what was going on in the little reconstructed garden under the elm trees in Sugarhouse Lane.

CHAPTER IX

One night, under those trees, Hilary and Dora sat until very late, talking. It was a smothering hot night in early June; the day had been cruelly oppressive everywhere, and before supper the girls had gone up the river to the bridge, with a hundred or more exhausted neighbours, for a swim.

Cool and comfortable, they had later shared their supper in the garden; now a hot moon was sailing across the metallic dark blue of the relentlessly clear heavens, and great blots of lacy shadow fell upon the grass and the uneven bricks of the walk. The face of the little house looked charming in the uneven light; its primitive lines and steep roof suggested the picturesque past to Hilary's dreamy eyes. She fancied hoop-skirts moving in and out of that plain, fan-lighted door, or earlier still, the empire frocks of the Revolutionary days, when Hessians cut with their spurs the old benches of the Quaker Meeting-House, and stabled their horses impudently in the Carolan gardens. What agitated, ringleted little face had peered from that doorway; what bandboxes, and strapped portmanteaux—what shovel bonnets and caped cloaks had made hurried departures through their little arched gate?

"Hilary!" said Dora, suddenly.

Hilary roused from a dream. Dora was at her knee, on a low stool; she had been fiddling idly, but now she

laid the Amati upon the table where their rice and cherries had been lately finished, and turned in her seat, her clasped hands on Hilary's knees. Hilary, in the moonshine, could see the glitter of her earnest eyes.

"Hilary," said Dora, "I can't stand it. I have to talk to you!"

"My darling. . . ." Hilary murmured, at a loss.

"I—Hilary, I *must* know," Dora said. "Are you—are you—is Craig in love with you, Hilary?"

The question found Hilary totally unprepared; it came with the violence of a shock. Was he in love with her? She did not know. She had been content to wait, all through this marvellous springtime. She knew he liked her, depended upon her, she felt sure that some day he was going to ask her to be his wife. But placed as she was, guardian of herself and Dora, she could know no more. He had never touched her, never claimed from her the kiss of which she sometimes wistfully thought. No man had ever kissed her.

"I think he is!" said Dora, calmly, and waited.

"And if he is?" Hilary countered, stroking Dora's soft little hand that lay in her own.

"If he is," Dora answered in a hard voice, "I am going away."

"Going away?" Hilary echoed, painfully awakened from her dream.

Dora was silent for a moment, and Hilary saw a stern, grave expression upon the young face that was turned up to the warm sky.

"Yes," Dora said, finally, in a quiet, determined tone, "I think I will go away."

"To Europe? To—to work with Kronski?" Hilary asked, bewildered and uneasy.

"Oh—*Kronski!*" Dora exclaimed, impatiently. "No," she added, more quietly. "That's done for, Hilary. I shall never touch my violin again. I—I *can't!*"

"*Butterfly!*" Hilary gasped, her house of life dissolving about her.

"I can't," Dora repeated. "That's over. If Craig cares for you, it's only right, Hilary. You've had more than your share of trouble—you're an angel, everyone knows that. And of course he loves you," sobbed Dora, suddenly breaking into desolate tears, and laying her head on her sister's knee, "why shouldn't he? But I—I can't stand it! I've—I've—haven't you seen it? Haven't you seen that it's always been Craig—always—since that very first night when Kronski came! I've never had a happy moment since, not *one*. I can't help it! I'd rather die," Dora rushed on passionately, her wet face raised for a moment, and her eyes meeting Hilary's defiantly, "I'd rather die than stop caring! He—he sat next to me that night, and talked—talked to me—and I—I——"

"Dora, my dearest, you must control yourself!" Hilary interrupted, alarmed at her violence, her heart turned to ice. Amazement and consternation were making her feel dizzy and ill, but she knew enough to clasp her arms tightly about her sister, and as their faces touched they both broke into fresh tears.

"Hilary, I'm spoiling everything for you," Dora resumed again, after a moment, in a penitent and broken voice. "But I love him," she whispered, with trem-

bling lips, "and I always shall! I can't stay here—and just look on! I've got to get away, somewhere, Hilary—I'll get a job in an office, anything—just to be busy—to try to forget! But music——" she interrupted herself suddenly. "No, it doesn't mean anything to me any more. I can't get interested—I can't think of anything but Craig—it's no use trying!"

"You must not let yourself get all worked up this way, Butterfly," Hilary said, quietly. She felt confused and hurt, as if she had just had a violent blow upon the head; but it was reassuring to know that she could speak so naturally. "Craig is fond of us both, dear—he has never—he has never given me any reason to believe that it was especially—me."

Dora twisted her young body about, slid to her knees on the grass, and clasped her sister about the waist. Hilary, seeing her own hands, prim in their white cuffs upon Dora's shoulder, and feeling the youth in her own heart dying before this younger vision of youth and first love, was conscious of a vast desolation.

"Hilary, Hilary!" breathed Dora, her whole exquisite little person aglow with unearthly beauty in the summer moonlight, "it's my *life*. The career—the music—that was Father's plan, and Mother's plan. But this—this is *me*, Hilary! You don't know how I've suffered! It's the only thing I've ever wanted in my life. He's the only man that I've ever known—I can't seem to see the rest—I don't hear them! I—Hilary, I'd go to him barefoot, bareheaded, I'd follow him into any country—into the desert—into prison! Just the look in his eyes—just the smile—you know the way he smiles when he is pleased—Hilary, won't you help me,

you've always helped me? Won't you? Because otherwise I'm going away—where nobody knows me—where I can forget——"

Hilary kissed her; resting her face against Dora's face for a long minute, and closing her eyes. She felt exhausted with these few minutes of earthquake; her whole world was changed.

Presently she would go into the house, and light candles in the hot darkness, and brush her hair, and turn down the two white beds. To-morrow would come, and coffee-making, and her fresh dark blue dotted swiss for the office, and her broad hat. Old Kraut would come in with the invoices, and the extra packers would chatter in the shade of the ice house. Life would go on, changed and twisted as it was; she would live, because she would not die.

Butterfly loved Craig Spaulding. "Oh, God," prayed Hilary even in this first minute of bitterness and loss, "make him care for her! Don't let him break her heart!"

"My darling," she said, aloud, after an unmeasured silence, in which they had clung together, "don't let this thing be an unhappiness to you. A girl's love is a wonderful thing—no man is worthy of love like yours. He *does* like us, he does come to see us more than any one else! Just believe that it is all coming right, dear, and it *will* come right!"

Butterfly, breathing hard, and spent with emotion, rested against her childishly, their cheeks touching.

"I adore you!" she whispered, with a long breath.

And suddenly courage and confidence, almost joy, flooded Hilary's heart with an exquisite peace. A hun-

dred doubts and misgivings that had made the last weeks uneasy, that had made her definitely unwilling to face the relationship between herself and Craig, unwilling to analyze it, vanished completely. She had feared what his love might bring to her; she was not sure of herself under his mother's and father's eyes, under the eyes of his friends.

But she was always sure of Butterfly; the most exquisite and endearing and brilliant of all human kind. It was almost with relief that Hilary turned from the unfamiliar thought of encompassing her own happiness, and began to plan once more for that of Butterfly.

She had cherished a little dream of herself as young Mrs. Spaulding; of what this brilliant match would mean for a quiet little secretary from the Spaulding factory. There were a few days of strangeness and pain while she altered this dream, and put her wonderful little sister in her place.

But even this did not upset a nature as tempered as Hilary's. Her one great fear was that Craig might not seriously care for either of them. If Butterfly must be heart-broken, she decided, then all the more reason for the European trip. They would get away together, now, at once, if that should happen that would convince them that Craig had gone out of their lives.

Otherwise—well, the long-planned career must be temporarily abandoned. Mother and Father could wish no richer life for Dora than that of a good man's wife, safe from need of financial worry for ever, beloved, admired, socially secure. Young Mrs. Spaulding would be no less lovely a wife and mother because she could charm her husband's friends with her violin.

And Hilary's self? But she would not think of herself. She would—oh, there were a thousand things that she might do. She might travel for a little while——

The thought of a steamer deck, without Butterfly, would choke her at this point. No Butterfly, and no Craig, with his smooth dark head, and his ready, gray-eyed smile, and his kindly, interested voice. She must manage to live without those two—for awhile.

"But they will have children," Hilary breathed to herself, over her desk, "darlings! And then I can be with them, part of the time, anyway——"

One afternoon, two or three days after her talk with Butterfly in the moonlight, Craig came to her desk with some important letters. When Hilary's clever, swift right hand had transcribed them, he still lingered for a few minutes, in his usual mood of friendly interest in what concerned her.

"Frightful weather!" he commented. "I was out on a yacht, all day yesterday, off Long Beach. And I wished a hundred times that you and Butterfly were there!"

"I always feel that one would be terribly dependent upon the other people on a trip like that," Hilary observed, thoughtfully. Craig for the hundredth time was struck with surprise at her wisdom.

"These were not agreeable people, and we ate and drank too much!" he confessed, with his sudden smile.

"Ah, well, that's what I'd be afraid of," Hilary said. "Dora and I, and the Rennys, got an old boat," she went on, "and went up the Rancocas—oh, miles. We swam—it seems to me the water never was so heavenly,

and we cooked lunch at that lovely little beach up where the old dredgers are!"

"With seventy-five other people!" Craig criticized, in his turn.

"Oh, no!" she said, surprised. "Only two other parties; a nice old doctor and his wife from Camden; he was nearly blind and she read to him; their son was decorated in the war, and they have five grandchildren. And then a dear little Swedish mother and father with four little children. They were so afraid they'd drown, and Dora and little Jim Renny kept rescuing them! Boats went by, of course, but the people were all singing, and happy——!"

He was watching her with a half-smile.

"Does it ever strike you that you are an unusual person?" he asked.

She flushed, shook her head almost as if she were displeased.

"Well, are you and Butterfly to be at home to-night?" Craig smiled. "I have two alligator pears for you, and a box of taffies for her Ladyship. And be sure you tell her that I missed you yesterday!"

The sudden flame of courage in Hilary's heart was like a prayer. They were both standing now: she to go into the outer office on some errand; Craig meditating a drive, perhaps with them both, before it was time for dinner. Outside, a burning, humid day lingered to its unrefreshing close. The air smelled heavily of cooking fruit.

"Shall I tell her that, Craig?" she asked, trembling, and with sudden significance.

He looked at her, surprised, and a little confused.

"She's only eighteen," Hilary faltered, sudden tears in her eyes. "I—I don't want you to hurt her, Craig!"

His face grew very grave. He walked to the window; looked out upon the cluttered, dusty yard, the men pushing small trucks loaded with bright, unlabelled tins of fruit.

Had he analyzed where his feet were leading him, even an hour ago, he would have said that it was to this earnest girl in the thin brown dress, with her bright face pale, and her blue eyes clouded with the heat. But her words, her tears, brought to his mind a vision of Dora, Dora frail and eager and exquisite, Dora who seemed to him child and friend in one; and with a great rush of tenderness and humbleness and joy, he knew the truth.

"Hilary," he said, gently and seriously, coming back to stand beside her, "I don't want to hurt her—God forbid. You know what I want. Will you—will you let me tell her?"

Now that it was done—now that it was done—Hilary felt only an inclination to cry. To cry, and have him comfort her—to have someone, at last, share with her the loneliness of living! Her knees felt weak, and her head confused; she laid cold fingers for a second on his hand.

"Come to-night!" she said in an odd whisper.

"And are you glad, Hilary?" Craig asked, his own whole being flooded with gladness.

"Craig, what better could I have wished for her?" she stammered. He saw her lip shake again; she tried to smile, and went hurriedly from the room.

Craig drove her home half an hour later, and they

three circled the hot roads for a long hour before dinner; Dora sitting beside Craig on the wide front seat and breathing deep, ecstatic breaths of the moving air as they swept through Pemberton, and little Crosswix dreaming under its hot, muffling trees.

"On Sunday let's get an early start," he suggested, "and go to Atlantic City?"

"Oh, Craig!" Dora breathed, all June in her face.

Hilary felt oddly satisfied; over the weary exhaustion of her spirit she would share their joys, and she would always know that they owed some of them—just a little part—to her.

When they drove home, and while they dined languidly beneath the trees, thunder boomed in the burning north; there was now and then a hot puff of air that turned the leaves lazily. A sudden furnace gust blew open the gate, and Craig went to shut it. Hilary sipped her iced coffee slowly; she did not eat.

Later, she slipped away with the tray, and left Dora and Craig alone together. She saw Craig move his chair, and Dora half-turn in hers; their faces were close together, and they talked for a long, long time.

Hilary straightened the kitchen; went into the sitting room and straightened it, too, before she sat down at the piano.

Italian books on the table—they would not need Italian now. And the map of Munich; they had amused themselves by making familiar the directions and the streets and squares. No use now. And Dora's exercises——

Hilary began to play idly; and the exquisitely blending chords floated out into the walled garden, and made

more magical still the magic hour that Dora and Craig were sharing.

Suddenly windows rattled; a door slammed, and the high tops of the trees swung and tossed in violent agitation. Hilary ran to the door. The storm had not yet reached her sheltered garden, and Craig had his arm about Dora, and her head was upon his shoulder.

For one hard second Hilary stood still, watching them in the deep gloom. Then she called cheerfully:

"Children, come in!"

CHAPTER X

Craig told his father and mother a few days later, when he ran into town to lunch in the old family mansion in Madison Avenue. Rodney Spaulding, grizzled, thin, helpless in his wheeled chair, merely smiled and nodded. What his boy did always satisfied him.

Mrs. Spaulding was a magnificent person of sixty, gray-headed, stout, imposing. Her eyebrows were sternly black in a rather florid face, her eyes small, keen, and gray, her mouth heavy and faintly shaded with hair. She was an extremely clever, extremely sensible person, and she rather approved his decision than otherwise.

"I'm very glad it isn't Violet Vanderwort!" she said, ruffling her salad with her fork.

"There never was anything in that!" Craig answered, flushing.

"No, I know there wasn't," his mother said, briskly. "But let her alone."

"Your girl is musical, Craig?" his father asked, smiling.

"Oh, very—that's been all her life. Her mother was a professional musician; I don't suppose you ever heard the name of Sabine Charpentier?"

"On the contrary!" Mrs. Spaulding said, surprised. "I remember the name very well, and so do you, Rodney. Don't you remember when we were in Vienna,

in the 'nineties, that a pretty French girl with that burned-red looking hair was married at the Embassy to a Boston man, a musician? Collier—something Collier, of course! I hope your Dora has her mother's red hair, Craig."

"The sister has magnificent dark-red hair, ropes of it," Craig answered, "but Dora is fair. A soft sort of light brown hair, like—well, not gold, but awfully bright and soft."

"Bring 'em to lunch with us Thursday—Wednesday," his mother commanded. "Your father'll be downstairs. And don't go to-day without a present I have for Dora. Your grandmother's ring; it's old-fashioned, but she'll like it."

"Thanks, Mother," Craig said, gratefully, touching her firm, square hand.

"If she's what you say, you're very lucky," his mother said, unemotionally. "I'm going to that charity thing this afternoon, your father may stay for a little while. Your friend Violet's sister dances—the divorced one. You might come and break the news to her gently."

"Thanks," Craig said, grinning. "I'm done with that lot. I think I'll go back to my girl!"

It was only a week later, a feverish, enchanting, unbelievable week for Dora, that Hilary found one morning in her mail a large envelope of frail foreign paper, addressed in a flowing hand, with enormous scrolled capitals and bright violet ink.

She opened it; it was from Kronski. He was coming to America in the autumn for a stay of several weeks; he would give concerts everywhere, and he hoped to

see her and her Butterfly. During September he would have a New York studio, and "call the neighbours in," would they come to see him there?

Hilary read the letter, folded it, and sighed. She was alone at the breakfast table, on a bright hot shining morning; she fell into deep study over her untasted coffee.

Kronski, and the Amati, and the strange cities and strange languages that had made her future and Dora's for so many years—these were all faded like a dream now. Everything was changed; that dearly loved future that seemed to keep their father and mother still in their lives, and the hard, sweet, anxious past, the past of German verbs and hoarded carfares, of bread-puddings and worn shoes, of exquisite companionship, and of hopes and tears and joys shared!

All gone. All gone. What could she say to Kronski except that her sister was to be married in the fall, and was to go abroad with her husband? What could fame and wealth give Dora, whose days were one intoxicating round of glories and delights? Little Dora Collier had suddenly become an important person over-night; no mere vague promise of drudgery and possible success could appeal to Dora now.

"Butterfly," Hilary said, when her sister, looking like a sleepy doll, appeared in the doorway. "Here's a letter from Kronski. He'll be here in September——"

"He'll be here for the wedding, then!" Dora commented, yawning.

"I wish you could do some work with him, or with someone, Butterfly."

Dora was not listening; she buttered a roll.

"Oh, Hilary—what a time we had last night! I wish you had come! It is the most wonderful club you ever saw; chintzes and great fires, and such *people!* The music was horrible—jazz. I don't know why they like it——"

"But you will keep up your own music, dearest? Think—think what it meant to Mother."

Dora came about the table, climbed into her sister's lap, in a fashion she had never quite abandoned, and rested her soft little body against Hilary and her velvet cheek on Hilary's own. Her web of bright hair tumbled upon Hilary's shoulder.

"You old darling," Dora said, sleepily affectionate, "I'll do it for what it means to you! You and I will go see Kronski, if it's on the wedding-day itself, and we'll work like tigers at whatever he says I must do!"

CHAPTER XI

Dora Collier had been Dora Spaulding for more than two years when on a certain December afternoon Hilary Collier closed the little house in Mount Holly and climbed into the Spaulding motor-car, to be swept into town for a long visit with her sister.

She had made short visits before; all sorts of visits. Sometimes the beautiful and radiant Butterfly had swept down upon her in Mount Holly, to envelop her in energetic little arms that were muffled in great furs, or to dazzle her with summer costumes worthy of a princess. And sometimes they had had Hilary for a few nights in the city house; she had visited them for two weeks in Southampton, in the first summer after their marriage, and last summer had made a tour with them through the wonderful New England mountains, and up to the Canadian lakes.

But somehow to the older sister's hungry heart these glimpses had all been unsatisfactory. It was not that Dora and Craig did not include her loyally in their lives; not that they did not truly love her. But there was something lacking; or perhaps there was nothing lacking, perhaps that was it; perhaps it was all too easy, too rich and elaborate and flowing; Hilary, thinking of these things as the luxuriously warmed car swept her toward the city, smiled in wondering whether she was contrary enough to enjoy a little friction, to

like the privations that emphasized the pleasures of life.

She looked out at the shabby villages, the bare trees, the frozen roads. Impossible to imagine all this clothed with gracious leaf and blossom; the air balmy, the skies only too mercilessly blue! Every ugly little backyard, every disfiguring box and bit of broken fencing, every torn theatrical poster and patched roof, was glaringly evident to-day in a cold flood of sunlight.

Hilary had been doing an active share of village charity work in these more than two lonely years. She looked at babies now with eyes that estimated their probable chances of proper nutrition, and at humble neighbourhoods in terms of domestic thrift.

"That place—they could probably buy it for twenty-two hundred," she mused, interestedly. "They can't pay more than twelve dollars' rent—they could buy it for eighteen hundred, I daresay. Why *won't* they save, and invest in homes, now that wages are so high? And then we could beautify—with green fences and brick lanes—instead of all this shiftless moving about and letting things get so horribly run down! Now, that woman there—and that delicious new baby getting a sore nose in this icy air—and she'll probably say that all her children's noses always run all winter——"

She recalled herself with a laugh. These things did not concern her at the moment. She had six weeks' leave of absence, in the dullest season at the factory, and she was going in to see her Butterfly. Craig had added an imperative appendix to Dora's letter; she must come. "Butterfly hasn't been very well," he had written, "and I think you'll be the best tonic in the world for her!"

Not very well. Hilary smiled wisely. For more than a year she had been hoping that Dora might complain of being "not very well." It was needed to complete their felicity; the delight and the responsibility of parenthood. And it would anchor Dora, Hilary had said simply to Craig, months ago, when something like faint hopes of the great event had been disappointed.

Just why Dora should need an anchor neither she nor Craig discussed. But it was perfectly evident that the twenty-year-old wife would be the happier for the new care. Hilary prayed, with her blue eyes upon the passing snow-covered flats outside of Hoboken, that this was the real reason for her summons now.

The young Spauldings had never lived in Mount Holly, as had been their plan when first they were engaged. Just before the quiet wedding old Rodney Spaulding's lameness had taken a new turn, and it seemed best that he should try a treatment abroad. So the senior Spauldings had followed the bride and groom to Europe, meeting them in England, in Italy, in Monte Carlo, and before Christmas Craig had come back to assume the management of the exporting offices, in New York, and had taken possession of his father's handsome home in Madison Avenue.

Twice in the two years his mother had come flying to America for brief visits, but Rodney Spaulding was well and comfortable in a Paris apartment, and she was unwilling to risk moving him away from the physician who seemed to understand his case so well. So Butterfly remained mistress of the old home, and it was to this home that Butterfly's big motor-car was bringing Hilary this afternoon.

It was five o'clock, and cold twilight in the city, when she went up the carefully scraped brownstone steps, and into the big warm hallway. Butterfly came with a rush to meet her.

"Oh, you darling!" the little hostess cried, delightedly. "Did you understand why I couldn't go? I've had such a wretched cold, and there was that horrid rehearsal! I've been dancing myself dead," added Butterfly, leading Hilary into the big sitting room behind the long drawing room, where several young men and women were congregated about an enormous open fireplace. "You know these people, Hilary—Rose West, and Katrina Clarke, and Jim Clarke, and Cy Dwyer? Sit down, dearest——"

She put Hilary into the immense davenport before the blaze; Hilary smiled confusedly at all the friendly faces. Most of the women were furred, they were smoking cigarettes and looked at her from under dashing hats.

"And me. . . ." said a dark young man who was lounging with an elbow against the mantel.

"Oh—Mr. Cecil Atherton," Butterfly introduced, with a negligent glance toward him of amusement and apology. She pronounced it "Sizzle." She sat down, leaning forward with her elbows almost on her knees, and accurately and firmly applied a perfumed little stick of lip-red, in an exquisite cloissonné tube, to her full lips. "Does any one want more cocktails?" she asked, looking about. "No, thank you, Banks, no more!" she added, carelessly, to the butler. "Do you see our fireplace, Hilary. Isn't it adorable? We had it done while we were in Newport this summer!"

"Boarding with the Treemaynes," said young Mrs.

West, significantly stressing the first word. They all laughed.

"No, but wasn't that delicious?" Butterfly asked, with her wise little smile. Hilary gathered that the joke told against her imperturbable little sister, but nobody explained what it was. They talked in busy murmurs, these young persons who saw each other every day, perhaps several times a day, and who had nothing to talk about. Butterfly was coquetting lazily with the man she called "Sizzle." Hilary could hear the young man and woman who shared with her the davenport conferring earnestly:

"No, I don't think she did, Walt! Because Dot Painter was there. . . ."

"Well, then, what the deuce was he crabbing about?"

"Because of what that dumb-bell Rogers girl said. . . ."

"Oh, Lord—Lord! He didn't think she meant Paula. . . ."

"Well, I can only suppose he did. But the putrescent part is that we can't go on changing places and rehearsing this way. It's Monday week, after all! I can't do it, Walt. Allen's hardly speaking to me now. . . ."

There was much more; some of the others joined in. Hilary listened as intelligently as she could. She gathered that some man named Rutty, whose wife was known as Paula, had had too much Scotch, and had made what Sizzle languidly described as a bally arss of himself, because the Rogers girl had said that she saw Paula having lunch downtown with a third person, unnamed, but presumably male. And all this group

now feared that Rutty would resent Paula's appearing in a Spanish dance at the approaching Charity Ball with the said unknown.

"Cy, talk to my sister. This doesn't interest her!" Butterfly commanded.

"But perhaps it interests *him*," Hilary suggested, playing her part as well as she could.

"Oh, on the contrary, your sister interests me," young Dwyer said readily to Butterfly, with his reedy laugh, as he squeezed himself in beside Hilary on the davenport; she had to square herself about, and sit erect, her knees tense, to keep from being actually in his arms. "And I think I am going to love her madla, passionatela, and deepla," he added, grinning at Hilary. "Tell me the news?" he went on, animatedly. "Hev Watkinses sold their caow? But I forgot you come from a Quaker town," he interrupted himself. "Did thee hear that thee was to be asked to Abbotts when their cousins come visiting them?"

Hilary laughed. She rather liked this rosy, silly, tall, and weedy boy. He had a certain gushing affectation of femininity that always amused her; she had seen him several times since the occasion when he escorted his pretty sister Mrs. Vanderwort to Butterfly's wedding.

"Of course, our village conversation doesn't compare to *this*," she admitted, in a mischievous aside. Cyrus nodded with sudden comprehension in his somewhat vacuous face.

"Aren't we idiots?" he asked, confidentially. "But you know we have to talk about something, don't we? Feller I knew—dear sort of a chap, too—killed at Château-Thierry—he *would* go—rest of us ragin'

because we were confined to quarters for being A.W.O.L.——"

"Oh, Cy, for heaven's sake, *say* something!" Dora, who had settled herself like her namesake butterfly upon the broad soft arm of the davenport, next to Hilary, asked pathetically. For answer Mr. Dwyer sprang vigorously to his feet, and cried out defiantly:

"But I tell you I *am* the Prince!" And again everybody laughed.

"Oh, will you ever forget *that*——?" drawled Katrina Clarke, getting up. "Darling, we have to go," she said to Dora. "It's almost six, and we have a theatre dinner. Come, James, unwind yourself from Rose!"

"Good heavens!" Mrs. West cried, indignantly, literally unwinding herself, however, from the immense chair in which she and Jimmy Clarke had been sunk, deep in conversation. "What coarse expressions you use, Katrina! Good-night, Miss Collier—awfully nice to have you with us for awhile. Good-night, Papillon! Come on, whoever's giving us a lift! See you all tomorrow night at the Chamberlains'?"

All saying exactly the same thing, they trailed out, leaving only Cecil Atherton, who in his languid and disinterested way seemed to have something further to say to Butterfly.

"You must go now," Butterfly told him, "I want to take my sister upstairs! Yes, show Miss Collier her room, Emma," she said to the maid who had come in answer to her message, "and I'll be right upstairs! About the minuet, Cecil," she added, to the man, always pronouncing his name in the fashion Hilary disliked faintly as being an affectation. They turned

back to the fireplace; Hilary went upstairs with Emma.

She had not had time to do more than follow the maid into the beautiful suite that was ready for her when Butterfly, breathless, came flying after them.

"You darling!" Butterfly said, kissing her again. "Didn't they make you wild, hanging on that way! We all came home from the rehearsal; I couldn't help their coming in. Well, how do you like this—isn't it lovely? And you see, books here, and writing things, and you can always have a cosy little fire; isn't it nice? And we took away the old hangings, and cut that window——"

"Craig's mother won't mind?" Hilary asked, always afraid that this amazingly daring young creature would offend.

"Oh, no, she's delighted! We talked it over when she was here in April. Isn't this fun, having you here! I've had the horridest cold—been wretched!"

"Only a cold?" Hilary asked, whimsically, over real disappointment. Emma was decorously unpacking her bag, moving quietly from one luxurious room to the other. There were fragrant roses scenting the warm, bright air; lights glowed everywhere, and in the new fireplace a delightful coal fire was burning in a bed of pink flame.

"Only a cold, you bad thing!" laughed Dora. "You're as bad as the rest of them," she ran on, gaily. "I sold my riding-horse this spring because I wanted to get another when we went to the Show this winter, and all the girls got so personal I had to buy another, and ride faster than ever!"

"Dora, but you look a little tired!" Hilary said,

affectionately, when the maid had gone, and they were alone.

"Oh, tired!" Dora exclaimed. "Don't say the word, now, with the season just starting! We haven't a dinner date left until after Christmas; all the débutantes are working twelve hours, with no overtime, as Cy Dwyer says—and all I could do, Hilary, was to say that you'd come to things if you felt like it, and if you didn't, I wouldn't make you!"

"Me? Oh, horrors!" Hilary protested. "But how does Craig like it?" she asked.

Was it her anxious fancy, or did a little shadow fall upon Dora's happy face? Dora had dropped exhaustedly into a chair, now, and was smoking a cigarette; her body relaxed, her arms flung at full length over the arms of the chair, her eyes half-closed. She raised the cigarette to her lips with great sweeps, puffed, flung her arm down again.

"He hates it—mostly," she admitted. "He likes bridge; sometimes he has a good time. But he's working awfully hard, and now and then he sends me off without him. You know," Dora added, more simply, throwing away the last of her cigarette, and leaning forward with widened eyes toward Hilary, "you know, the awful thing is, you've got to do everything, or you might just as well do nothing! You get caught into it —carried along, really——"

"I can see that!" Hilary agreed, eagerly, feeling that at last this was the real Dora.

"People ask you weeks ahead," Dora continued; "you like them, it's your own crowd, and so what can you do? I stay in bed mornings, and have massage,

and skip the women's lunches as much as I can—but even then," she broke off to complain, "you miss something! Last week Elsie Hutchings had a divorcées' luncheon and bridge—it wasn't really that, of course, but Vi Vanderwort was there, and her sister Cissy Sloat, both divorced, and Harriet Pemberton, and we call them that. And Jessie Duer came in with the Russian dancer—Androwska—we're all perfectly mad about her! That was about six, and then all went up to Jessie's place in Westchester, and she telephoned for her pianist, and danced; they had a marvellous time!"

"But, Dora, don't you and Craig ever have a quiet evening, in front of the fire, as you and I used to, with the old stove?" Hilary asked. Dora, who had smiled, and had begun to shake her head slowly, suddenly looked thoughtful, looked even a little wistful.

"That was fun, Hilary," she said, softly, after a moment in which her eyes were far away. "No, we don't do that—we never have, you know! We came back from our honeymoon in December, two years ago, and the thing began at full speed. *That* was the worst rushing we ever did!" Dora recalled, with a shudder. "Dinners and dinner dances! But I was mad about it all then. Then in March we went to Bermuda, with the Wests," she went on. "That was restful, in a way, because we played bridge all the time; and then we went to Southampton, and that fall I went to the Morrills' camp, in Canada; Craig stayed in town, he was busy at the office. It divides the year up into such little scraps, all this going!" she finished, apologetically. "Oh, yes, and this year we were three weeks on the Morleys' yacht, just before the polo," she added.

"Hilary," she began again, with a sudden change of tone. "Tell me, how do you like Cecil Atherton?"

"He's the Englishest Englishman I ever saw!" Hilary confessed, laughing.

"His brother is Lord Southeringham," Dora observed. "He has one daughter, about eighteen. Isn't it funny that Cecil will really inherit, like a book, unless his brother marries again?"

"It *is* funny," Hilary said, struck.

"Did you like him?" Dora asked, a little consciously, after a pause.

"Well, I hardly—yes, I think I did," Hilary hesitated.

"He's—well, he doesn't impress you the first minute, that's the way with those English people," Dora resumed. "But he's a remarkable person, really. Plays polo, he's an eight goaler. Craig thinks he plays wonderfully. And then he plays tennis and golf, too, and at home he's master of hounds. You know," Dora added, dreamily, leaning back again in her chair, "the English have a leisure class; we haven't. Cecil, in his heart, thinks we are all bounders, I'm perfectly certain! Not all of us, but some of us."

"You met him in England?" Hilary asked, to say something. For some reason undefined the topic did not please her.

"No, I only met him last April, when Craig's mother came back. They had made friends on the steamer; she liked Cecil, and she introduced us to him when we met her. We all went to have tea together—it was a simply gorgeous day—you know, one of those really hot spring days when everybody's out in new hats?"

Dora said. "Then he was with us on the yachting trip at Newport," she added. "You'll like him."

"Was he in the war?" Hilary asked, very sure she would not like him, and hoping that Dora's answer would discredit him.

"Oh, rather! D. S. O. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel," Dora answered, working over her lips again.

"Butterfly, dearest, why do you do that?" Hilary burst out. "You've got such pretty colour. I hate to see you doing what all the others do!"

"I don't—much; it's just a bad habit," Dora said, good-naturedly. "Hilary, darling, we're going to a simple dinner at the Posts' to-night. I know you like them and they like you, and dear old lady Post got seats for the new play—this French play that was written by a father, and played by the son—or maybe it's the other way about—anyway, they're all crazy about it! I'm going to wear my old blue velvet, and be comfortable. Did you bring your black with the beads? That's lovely. I wonder what some women I know would give for your hair," Dora added, in farewell, leaning over Hilary, who had flattened herself out on the bed, and pressing her cheek against the coppery mass of it. "That's Craig whistling," she finished, "and I must go and make myself agreeable to the tired business man!"

CHAPTER XII

HILARY saw Craig an hour later, when she went down through the wide hallways and stairways, her evening coat over her arm, and her eyes and cheeks bright with the unusual excitement of going out to dinner and the theatre.

Craig was already dressed, smoking a cigarette beside the library fire; his eyes brightened with genuine pleasure when he saw her. He put her coat aside, and they stood smiling at each other, and exchanging the first of the news. She thought that he always looked his best in the severity of evening dress, and to-night she knew that he was finding her at her prettiest, too; she was a little thinner, a little more slender, than the old Hilary; there were new lines of sweetness and strength about her mouth. He had always liked this honest mouth, with its frank, wide smile, and these honest blue eyes that widened so childishly when Hilary was unusually in earnest, and he liked them more than ever to-night. There was something definite, even determined, about her, he decided. She was that rare and indescribable thing: a personality.

She talked to him with all the easy confidence of a sister. For her old first feeling for him, the half-realized yearning and dreams, had slowly become that. Not easily, for Hilary did not indulge in day-dreams

easily, and it had been the brightest of all her day-dreams that some day the young vice-president of Spaulding Brothers might make her his wife. It had included so happy a present, it had so tenderly touched the future, and seemed so logical an outcome of the past, that she could not let it go without night hours of wakeful wretchedness and pain and days of shame and self-reproach.

And to see Butterfly radiant in the possession of all she had ever coveted, and much, much more, to see all of Craig's devotion and generosity given to her little sister, dearly and deeply as Hilary loved her, was a bitter trial. But Hilary weathered it with one slow hour of unseen battle after another; pushing down the thoughts that would rise up and hurt her, and forcing herself to rejoice in Butterfly's joy.

It was all the easier because Craig and Dora were wrapped in each other, and in a hundred new delightful plans, and did not need her, and would not have noticed anything even much more obviously amiss. Hilary suffered alone, and conquered alone, and was the richer woman for it. Now she could meet Craig with real affection and pleasure, untouched by any secret personal hope or pain.

"And to-morrow you'll be out at cock-crow looking at new gowns, of course?" he teased her. She answered him with a serious look.

"I do need new gowns—two, at least. I need something for afternoons, or for such a dinner as this," she said, thoughtfully, "and then I ought really to have one *stunning* gown!"

"I wish you'd let us give them to you, Hilary," he

said with a smile. But when she shook her head, with the protest that she was rich, he did not press it.

"But I'll tell you what I *am* going to beg from Butterfly," she presently confessed, animatedly, "and that's a fur coat. She has so much fur, and I really *can't* afford that. She told me she was going to get rid of the old one—the brown one——"

Craig remembered buying that coat, in Paris, for his ecstatic and thrilled little wife. What an event in those happy days that special occasion had been!

"How do you think Butterfly's looking?" he asked, suddenly.

"Not so very well," Hilary answered, reluctantly, after a moment when she frowned faintly at the fire.

"She goes too hard!" Craig said, smilingly, half to Butterfly herself, who came in at the moment in the briefest and slimmest of dark velvet frocks, with only a touch of azure chiffon over her exquisitely thin childish little shoulders. Hilary noticed that the bare arms were still a child's arms, thin and soft.

She smiled radiantly at her sister and husband; Hilary came to know that smile well in the next few days; it was a new smile.

Dora had been sensitive to Hilary's criticism, years ago, and as a bride she had been almost hysterically hurt by any hint of censure from Craig. She had cried, sulked, raged in those days; Dora, in a healthy tantrum, or sunk into tearful depression, had been one of the realities of Hilary's life.

But Dora never raged and wept and scolded now. Instead, she presented that brilliant, reassuring smile to all observers; she was always gay, sweet, apparently

tractable, apparently impressed. Hilary had been with the Spauldings several days before it occurred to her with a pang of apprehension that this smile really meant nothing; or rather that it meant far too much. It meant that behind this immovable barrier Dora was living her own life, thinking her own thoughts, entrenched in a fortress of her own determined little will.

Did Craig see it, Hilary wondered, had he defined that smile as she had? She could not tell. He seemed a little more sober, a little less demonstrative with Dora than he had been, and he occupied what was virtually a different room now. But he himself took an opportunity of mentioning carelessly that he liked to read in bed very late; Dora, Hilary understood, must have all the sleep possible. And the rooms were connected, after all, by a wide arch that was never closed.

She liked him so much, liked him more than ever indeed; and it hurt her that Dora should seem never to see him at all. Dora was always sweet with him, but she rarely addressed him. But Hilary liked to watch his pleasant, intelligent mouth, liked to make him talk about what he was doing, and about the new and important books he was constantly reading, and loved to startle from him the little abrupt, reluctant laugh she remembered so well. She loved to find him her partner, as she often did, at dinner, or next to him in the theatre; they murmured together congenially, finding always more than they had time to say.

One day she spoke of the business of the Mount Holly packing plant, and that led Craig in turn to speak of his own affairs. He took pencil and paper, and esti-

mated, with an idle air of caring very little about it, exactly where his own personal finances stood.

Between sixty and eighty thousand a year; yet he was borrowing money for household expenses this year. Hilary stared at him, aghast.

"Craig *Spaulding!* But where does it go to?" she exclaimed.

They were alone in the library; Dora had been escorted, by Jesse Duer, to the last of the rehearsals at the West House. Craig was to call for her at about eleven o'clock. A fire was burning, and its quiet flicker, and the great coloured lamp above Craig's chair, were the only lights in the room. Hilary sat relaxed in deep shadow, her slender ankles and velvet round-toed slippers crossed on the hearth.

"I'll be hanged if I know!" he said, boyishly.

"But seventy *thousand* dollars——!" the girl said. "And you don't pay any rent. And you sold your polo ponies last year——"

"Yes, but I did pay rent last year, I paid five thousand for that Southampton place," Craig said.

"Craig, did you *buy* it?"

"No, that was just for the season. And then there are the three cars, and seven house servants here, and—oh, I don't know, everything!" he said. "We have to give dinners, and buy tickets, and give wedding presents, and send flowers, and we have bills at about forty places, and clothes cost like the deuce! And then there's income tax——"

"It's scandalous!" said Hilary, aghast. "I think Dora Collier must be crazy."

"I want her to be happy," Craig said, in an odd tone,

after a silence. Hilary saw that he was staring into the fire, his handsome face very grave.

"Happy!" she echoed, vaguely apprehensive. "Well —well, but why shouldn't she be?"

"I don't know, Hilary," Craig said, suddenly, "but —but she's not!"

"Poor Butterfly!" Hilary whispered, her heart turned to ashes.

"I'm never going to say this again; she is my dearly loved wife," Craig began, steadily, after a silence. "And you are her sister, and I know, Hilary, that her happiness means more to you than your own. If Butterfly's life—turned out badly, I know that there would never be any happiness for you, you don't have to tell me that! But—she's only twenty now, Hilary; she's only a little girl, really, and she needs you every hour of her life. She obeyed you—she believed in you. I took her away from you; I spoiled her. It amused me to see her running her own roadster, it amused me when the shop people asked her, 'Daughter?' when she went about charging things to Mrs. Craig Spaulding. Everyone fell in love with her; it never occurred to me that it might be bad for her. It never occurred to *her*," he added, as Hilary preserved a stricken silence, "that she might make mistakes. She—she resents any hints from me; I don't blame her, it's all my fault! But I know now that what made her wonderful—so strangely wonderful, to me, those two years ago, was *you*, back of her, making life a sort of fairy story, as you always do, laughing about everything and turning it into a game, cooking those little meals, and wearing the little velvet dresses—like that one, now. I didn't

mean to say this—it doesn't matter, anyway. But I want you so awfully to stand by her now, scold her, straighten her out. She'll take anything from you!"

Hilary did not answer; she was too deeply stirred and too much frightened to find words. She sat looking steadily at the fire, her heart troubled, and her mind a whirlpool of anxious thoughts.

"Be patient with her, Craig," she said, after a long silence. "She's—pure gold."

"Yes, I know she is!" he answered. And when they spoke again it was on another subject.

In Dora's smart little car the sisters drove about in the winter crowds: shopping, planning for Christmas, enjoying the excitement and the charm of the big city. They lunched sometimes at home, sometimes with other women at hotels or clubs, they always had some special engagement for tea, and always another for the evening.

"Oh, Dora, do let us be alone together, *once!*" Hilary begged, one morning, when even the visit she loved, to Dora's bedroom, was unsatisfactory. It was always unsatisfactory, Hilary thought, but it was only to-day that the truth suddenly occurred to her. Dora's maid was always coming and going; Dora's little French bedside telephone was always ringing; Dora's manicure would come in at about eleven, or her masseuse, or the woman to rub her hair.

Hilary usually came into Dora's room at about ten o'clock, when Craig was an hour gone. Dora was waking then, turning and twisting her lovely little body luxuriously in a sea of beribboned and embroidered baby pillows. Emma would be decorously admitting

the winter daylight; Alice would slip downstairs silently for Mrs. Spaulding's tray.

Dora, tousled, charming, her cheeks pink with sleep, would kiss her sister affectionately, glance at her letters, and share with her coffee, her boiled egg, her heart-rending yawns, and the newspaper headlines, the pleasure of Hilary's society.

"I ought to have a secretary," Dora would fret, disgusted at the enormous number of invitations she must acknowledge. Hilary took charge of them for her nowadays; she really enjoyed stacking them, making notes in pencil on each, and disposing of them later, in a sunny corner of the big warm library. "I wish I could have a colour like this when I wanted it!" the little sister might further grumble, eyeing herself discontentedly in a great hand-mirror of French gold and blue.

On the morning when Hilary was suddenly moved to protest that they were never alone together, Dora looked thoughtful. Immediately, with the brilliant, docile smile, she reached for her telephone and cancelled her luncheon engagement. "My sister and I never have a minute alone together!" explained Dora, winning eyes on Hilary as she spoke. "Now, what shall we do?" she asked, when this was done. "Where shall we lunch, and what shall we do after lunch? It's Wednesday; would you like to go to a mat?"

Hilary would have liked to go into the tiny kitchen of the old brick house, to light the gas-stove and feel its heartening warmth gradually envelop them as they talked, to stretch fingers tired from violin strings, or shoulders tired from office work, and to explore the icebox for cold sweet potatoes and jellied soup.

As it was she could only say somewhat flatly:

"Well, let's do *something!*"

And Dora answered with great vivacity:

"Oh, we'll do *something!*"

But the "something" proved vaguely unsatisfying, as it developed. All the hotels were alike; to go to the club meant that Dora would be immediately surrounded. To penetrate into the fascinating crowded quarters of the city, buying nonsensical nothings, and eating in some unknown little "Sign of the Green Teapot," or "Dolly Madison Tea Room," might have thrilled Dora Collier three years ago but would not be especially interesting to Mrs. Craig Spaulding.

They motored up into Westchester County, and had luncheon at a large hotel overlooking the icy stretches of the sluggish Hudson. Dora was entirely manageable. She put her lip-stick untouched back into her gold-meshed bag as often as she instinctively took it out, and she smoked only an occasional cigarette.

"It's *table d'hôte*," she said, resignedly, at luncheon. "Ugh! Orange punch after the entrée, and choice of rice pudding with strawberry jam sauce, lemon meringue pie, or maple sundae. Well, luckily we're not hungry . . ."

Hilary settled herself with a resolute determination to extract some enjoyment from the occasion. She smiled at Dora's remark that it looked to her like an Old Ladies' Home. Frail old bodies in plain satin or taffeta dresses were indeed filtering into the big room; the winter light fell dully upon white heads elaborately crimped and metamorphosed.

But Hilary saw one wholesome, pleasant-faced woman

leading a troop of small children in: three little girls, two very small boys, and steeled to sudden resolution, she said:

"Butterfly, you know that if you had gone on with your music you would have had to work very hard, don't you?"

"My dear, I'm going to take up my violin work again immediately!" Butterfly began, smiling contritely. Hilary began to hate that smile. Patiently she said:

"No, I don't mean that. This is what I mean, dear. Any life ought to have work in it, even if it's only the work that goes to a happy marriage—pleasure isn't everything, you know——"

"I begin to see Craig's fine Italian hand in this," Butterfly said, good-naturedly. "Craig *hates* me to have a good time! Katrina Clarke says that if we go somewhere and are bored to death, then Craig is perfectly satisfied. But if I *enjoy* myself——!"

Hilary began to feel angry.

"Dora, it's not nice to let a giddy, silly woman like Mrs. Clarke criticize Craig!" she protested.

Dora shrugged, sighed, and went on with her meal.

"I know it's not. But what *does* Craig want?" she demanded, equably.

"Why, I don't think he wants anything, dear. He loves you!" Hilary answered, bewildered. "But it seems to me that you are being very reckless with your happiness. You and he are never alone, you are keeping up this feverish, rushing life, and you don't seem to me to be *building*——"

"We're all right!" Dora said, briefly, taking out a cigarette that she lighted with trembling fingers.

"Oh, of *course* you're all right!" Hilary exclaimed, deeply uneasy and distressed. "But it seems such an unnatural life to me, Dora. I always imagined you and Craig with a group of your own close friends about you, with music and hospitality, and some day children——"

"The trouble is, that I tried to make myself agreeable to Craig's friends, and they like me, and now he hates the whole crowd of them!" Dora burst out, with the facility of one who has long stored a grievance. "Why, these are all *his* friends! I didn't know anybody when I was married, he introduced me to every one of them! I can't help it if they like me——"

"No, but now think, Butterfly. Look at a woman like Louise Jeffries—why couldn't *she* have been your friend?" Hilary persisted. "It seems to me the Sunday we had at their house was the nicest I've had here. She's a sweet, pretty woman, she knows all the nice people, and yet she and her husband live so quietly down there on Long Island——"

"Excuse me; I'm not a cow!" Butterfly said, flippantly.

"Dora, I don't think that's nice," her older sister said, sternly. "To speak of those three beautiful little babies and their mother as if——"

"If you consider them beautiful, I don't!" interrupted Dora. "That oldest one with her front teeth out, and the baby looking like a half-wit, with his big, heavy head. And another coming, and poor Louise dragging herself about like something on wheels——"

"I thought she looked perfectly beautiful——"

"The middle one, yes," continued Dora, darkly,

"I rather liked him. He's cute enough. But Sid Jeffries has lost almost all his money, or at least a lot of it, and what Louise gets out of it is a marvel to me. Have you finished?" she asked, restlessly, suddenly getting to her feet. "I paid him, didn't I? Good-bye, old ladies—I'll tell you what, Hilary, as we pass that big table you say to me, 'Oh, Irene Castle, you did not!' and watch them all turn round and watch us. Cy Dwyer and I did that once in the Vanderbilt, and I thought——"

Hilary missed the rest. She felt that a smile almost as unreal as Dora's was upon her face as she followed her little sister out. But Dora was still amiable; she asked Hilary what she would like to do now, should they drive? Should they run into town and finish up some shopping? Dora had had an exquisite miniature of herself painted for Craig's Christmas present; Hilary was anxious to see it finished, and in its beautiful frame.

In the exotic German painter's studio, with the artist herself writhing about them in her curious draperies, Hilary by chance discovered that two miniatures of Dora had been done. Dora and some friends she met in the studio, Violet Vanderwort among them, were talking animatedly; Madame von Hinz was at the telephone, and Hilary was drifting about enjoying herself in her own quiet way.

Back of a great painted leather screen, upon a table littered with oils and brushes, Dora's beautiful likeness was carefully laid; it was on ivory, painted against a gold background, and looked like a Fra Angelico angel until one leaned close enough to see the sophisticated little face, the metallic scallops of hair, and the young

body severely outlined in sweeping rich brocade of oriental prune-colour, scarlet, lemon, peacock, and dark gold.

Beside it Hilary was amazed to find another portrait of Dora, prettier, she thought, than the original one. This was smaller, painted upon an ivory disc not much larger than a silver dollar. It merely gave Butterfly's beautiful head and a bare curve of half-turned shoulder. The dark brown eyes looked up with an infantile sweetness, the red lips were half-parted, and the twist of the young head gave a wide sweep of the soft, straight, flyaway hair.

Hilary, looking about in her pleasure and astonishment, found the German artist and Violet Vanderwort beside her.

"Ah, but you was not to see that, now I shall be well scoldet!" exclaimed Madame von Hinz, in consternation. "I do not expect Madame to-day, and I am about to wrap it up, and now all is lost!"

Another Christmas secret! Hilary's heart sang. The big one was for Craig, and the little one for herself, of course. In an eager whisper she reassured the painter, and enlisted Mrs. Vanderwort's interest; they would say nothing about it. Madame was not to give Mrs. Spaulding any hint that her sister had spoiled the surprise. Hilary went back at once into the open studio, and was innocently turning the pages of a book of Whistler's pictures when Dora brought her the larger miniature for final comment.

CHAPTER XIII

HILARY'S Christmas present from Craig and Dora, when Christmas came a week later, was a great box that contained, as she knew the moment she saw it, an exquisite great soft wrap of fragrant, silky fur. Dora danced about her ecstatically as Hilary, almost in tears, slipped it on. Craig gave his wife a string of pearls—the beautiful milky globes themselves had been his mother's, but they were newly set, in fact two old strings had been blended into one, for Dora. Hilary gave both Dora and Craig the little things that she had a sort of genius for finding: bridge-pads stamped with their names, an address-book in which all the necessary addresses had been written in her charming hand; a little ship blown into a bottle for the little yacht that Craig and three other men owned and shared. Hilary had found it in the Ghetto, and Craig prized it more than anything else he received.

His wife's miniature went into a place of honour on the mantel, and to every one of the scores of friends who came in for eggnog and greetings, during the long day, he showed it proudly.

Yet it was the unhappiest Christmas of Hilary's life, and she presently suspected that Craig shared with her the brooding sense of something fundamentally wrong.

In the first place, where was the smaller miniature? Dora said nothing about it; Hilary opened the last of

her gifts without finding it. Had some accident befallen it? Was there some reason for the delay? Her heart was sick with disappointment as she turned about in her beautiful coat, and exclaimed over and admired her treasures and the others' treasures. Then, secondly, something was wrong with Craig; he was animated and talkative, as she was, but the instant he felt himself unobserved Hilary saw his face fall into grave, into almost sinister, brooding. Two or three times she saw him deliberately shake himself free of the oppressive thought, whatever it was, and force himself into the spirit of the day again.

And at one o'clock, when they, with a dozen or more chance guests, were about to straggle into the dining room, Hilary had a moment of such hideous awakening that for the rest of the day, and for many days, she could barely keep before the world the smooth surface that was necessary for Dora's preservation, for the safety of them all.

She had run upstairs with a double handful of beautiful Christmas ribbons, holly ribbons, broad black and blue and lemon-coloured ribbons from her coat-box, gold oriental ribbons and strips of beautiful silver and copper-coloured French ribbon. With her demure air of thrift, Hilary had gathered these together; there were little girls in Mount Holly who would think these were the most beautiful things in the world, she said.

She was running down again, to the lower floor that was so deliciously warm to-day, so scented with evergreens and violets, so pleasantly filled with furred, laughing women and beautiful presents and rich dark

rooms, and snapping fires, when the sight of soft snowfall out of doors made her pause, on the landing, to look out into pretty Madison Avenue.

The big brownstone houses all about were keeping Christmas as the Spauldings were; Hilary saw the gleam of Christmas trees in lace-draped windows, and the big limousines stopping and starting at opened doorways. The street was full of gaily moving people after the late services, and upon them all, and up against the gray quiet skies, the tiny even ropes of the snow were twisting, twisting, twisting, infinitely pure, infinitely cold and silent and sweet.

Snow. The last touch of beauty, she thought, entranced at the charm of the whole picture, and not without a homesick pang for little Sugarhouse Lane and her own sweet little walled garden in the snow.

Below her there was an odd turn in the hallway, where a passage into the new library had been cut some twenty years before. Hilary, looking down at this angle carelessly, saw Cecil Atherton and Butterfly come through from the library. In another minute somebody else followed: Rose West and Jim Clarke, and other young men. But in that instant Hilary saw.

She saw Cecil lightly enfold Butterfly with his arm and Butterfly give him a sidewise, upward glance that was full of radiant meaning. And at the same moment Cecil slipped his free hand into his breast pocket, and displayed something on his palm; something that Hilary knew rather than saw was a disc of ivory with a crystal rim and face.

Amazed, and a little dizzy, she leaned back against the window curtains of the landing; she heard Cy

Dwyer's laugh, and she heard him say: "But I tell you, I *am* the Prince!" for the thousandth time.

They had gone by; Craig was calling from below: "Hilary!" She must go down.

The utter confusion of mind and heart, as she did so, almost made her faint. Everything was a whirl of surprise—a thousand little half-remembered facts rushed to her consciousness even while Butterfly linked an arm in hers and an arm in Craig's, and pushed herself childishly between them into the dining room.

She remembered, dazedly, letting some man put cold turkey and hot Spanish macaroni upon her plate, she remembered now Butterfly's many mysterious if brief engagements during the last few weeks. She remembered telephone calls from which Butterfly came with a strange brightness in her eyes; she remembered notes, flowers, moments of unobserved murmuring with Cecil. This accounted for the incessant, elusive smile, for the cryptic air of self-content.

Why, on the very first day of her visit, Butterfly had made some excuse to remain downstairs with him alone for a few minutes; she had clouded even that happy hour by questioning Hilary about him; did Hilary like him? Did she realize that some day he would be a lord?

Hilary remembered other significant things: Butterfly's often-expressed contempt for what was American, her hints that in England the social structure was more stable, more admirable in every way——

She felt dizzy and hurt; she sat with her filled plate in a chair somewhat apart from the others, only hoping that she would not betray Butterfly, would not

make some stupid blunder. The thing appeared more important as she realized it more and more fully.

She knew there was no real mischief in Butterfly—the gay little innocent, inspiring, loving companion of eighteen ideal years! But Hilary felt uneasy: Butterfly was a woman now. This was no time for such caprices! She began hurriedly to eat and talk, but she could feel herself that there was a strained and conscious look upon her face; she drank her coffee, managed a smile for Craig as he sat down beside her.

"Salad, Hilary?" he asked.

"Oh, not yet! I've hardly started. I've had—I've had a stupid headache——"

"You have?" his concerned tone almost upset her. "Why didn't you say so?"

"It's really—really that I—I hate to see Dora with these people," Hilary burst out, vigorously, her own voice helping her to regain her self-control. "I know that some of them are nice—of course they are. But—but she wasn't brought up like that, and she can't stand it, Craig—she's too young!"

"Yet I think you could stand it, Hilary," Craig said, with an unsmiling look at her. "It amuses me to see how quietly you hold your own with them!"

"Did you get your Christmas present, Miss Collier? Don't move, Craig, I can squeeze in here on your chair for just a moment!" Violet Vanderwort asked, in her velvet voice, coming up to them. "Don't you remember the little miniature we saw at Von Hinz's that day?" she asked.

Hilary felt her mouth grow dry, and her hands get cold, as she smiled gallantly.

"Not yet," she managed to say easily, "perhaps it was for my birthday, in March!"

"It was the duckiest thing; Miss Collier and I stumbled upon it accidentally," Violet said, in explanation, to Craig. "Eat it!" she commanded, holding an olive against his lips. "Oh, Dora!" she called, "what became of that adorable little second miniature that Von Hinz did of you?"

Hilary felt the blood congeal in her veins. She would have liked to shake Violet. Dora, who had been laughing extravagantly, in a group of young men, turned innocent, puzzled eyes upon them.

"What miniature?" she asked, the last of her laughter dying from her puzzled yet perfectly serene little face.

"Oh, come now—come now!" Violet said. "We'll suspect you of some secret if you don't 'fess up!"

"Suspect me of nothing!" Dora drawled, good-naturedly, coming over to them. "But what I want to know is how you ever heard of it?"

"We saw it, Butterfly," Hilary contributed, hoping her anxiety did not show. She put her arm about Dora as Dora rested on the arm of her chair. "And I hoped it was for me!"

"You saw it!" Dora cried, in exasperation. "How on earth did she happen to let you see it? It *was* for you, Hilary, but the poor old thing begged so to have it for an exhibition that I let it go. And it was smashed —four of them were——"

"I know, you told me!" Hilary cried, breathing again.

"Yes, Frances Chislom's was," Paula Davenport

remembered, "poor Von Hinz was telling me! But she didn't say anything about yours, Dora."

"It was a surprise, I had asked her not to mention it," Dora said. "She's doing it over again, Hilary, and I think it's better, but I'm so *disgusted* that you found out!"

Hilary's eyes went about the circle; Craig was apparently neither listening nor interested, to everyone else the episode was worth no more than its face value. To everyone except Cecil Atherton, that is; Hilary could have sworn that his casual glance met Dora's as she spoke, and that the faint look of relief in his face as the awkward moment passed was unmistakable.

All through the rest of the day, throughout the family dinner with Craig's uncle, she was haunted by fears. Could Butterfly have been so blind, so childish—as to fall into this folly? Was her little innocent sister playing this dangerous game?

"She must be losing her mind," Hilary thought, feverishly, in the wakeful watches of the night. And she remembered other wakeful nights, years ago, when first their friendship with Craig had seemed so all-important to her; she remembered tossing and fretting then, over—what? Over nothing, it seemed now. Only a girl's silly, sensitive imagination at work then; now there were realities over which to worry. Dora married, and having trouble with her husband! And that husband the kindest, the most indulgent of men! Hilary felt that all life was darkened; nothing could come out of this confusion but shame and suffering.

For she instinctively distrusted Dora's smooth little story, and loss of faith in her darling was the hardest

phase of the whole matter to bear. If it had been illness, poverty, neglect, that she had been asked to share, how gladly she would have taken Dora home to the little Mount Holly house, how she would have consoled her, worked for her, planned for her! But this sweet and sickening poison, creeping into Dora's perfumed and soft and brilliant life, frightened Hilary. She did not know how to cope with it.

CHAPTER XIV

It was Hilary's custom to go downstairs at about half-past eight o'clock in the morning; usually she was alone at breakfast, and enjoyed it in the bright little breakfast room beyond the big dining room. Sometimes Craig joined her, but he was not very regular, and she never waited for him.

On the morning after her white night, feeling tired and still fearful, even after her hot bath and leisurely toilet, Hilary was going quietly through the upper hall on her way downstairs when Dora's bedroom door suddenly opened, and Dora, the picture of utter desolation, appeared in the doorway, and said her name.

"Come in here!" said Dora. Hilary with all her half-formed apprehensions returning in definite shape, and with redoubled force, went to the door and looked in.

Dora's bed was tumbled; she immediately sprang back among her pillows. Craig, with his face very grim, turned from one of the big windows, glanced at Hilary unsmilingly, and again turned his back.

"Craig is going away, Hilary," Dora said in a nervous, high voice. "He doesn't want any breakfast——"

"Going away?" Hilary asked, her heart lead.

She had to repeat the question before Craig turned, and said quietly:

"I'll put up at the club for a while—I'll let you know where I am——"

Hilary looked in sick amazement from one to the other.

"Oh, what *is* it!" she faltered, all her anxiety and love for them both in her voice.

"It's simply that I like to have my friends as well as anybody else," Dora began, proudly, as Craig kept silent.

"Sorry to drag you into this, Hilary," Craig said, suddenly, coming toward her, and paying no attention to Dora. "I have asked her to do what I don't consider a very important thing for me—she prefers not to——"

"Only to give up a friend who has always been very charming to *me*, that's all!" Dora interrupted, hotly. "Only hurt the feelings of a man——"

"I will not return to this house while that man has the entrée to it," Craig interrupted, passionately, in his turn. "Make him what presents you will, meet him where you like, if that's what you want," he added, bitterly, "but don't let *me* ever see him again!"

"Say to him, 'Cecil, I'll have to meet you out at the Museum, and then we can have tea at Childs'!'" Dora retorted, angrily. "I'm sorry, Craig, but even to please you, and to give you the full run of all the big hotels, so that you and Violet can have tea together——"

"Butterfly!" Hilary said, sorrowfully.

"Well, ask him if he didn't meet Violet and take her to tea the very day she got back from getting her divorce in California," Dora said, resentfully, after a brief pause.

"This is ridiculous!" Craig said, hotly. "Her mother wired me from Maine, asked me to meet Vi, and put her on the afternoon train. I hadn't seen her

for two years; she'd been with Cissie in California, getting her decree. I showed Dora the wire—but it's too preposterous to discuss!"

Hilary looked at Dora, confident that there would be at least an attempt at justification. But Dora pouted and looked down, and satisfied herself with saying mildly:

"Well, isn't that all I said?"

"Craig, you know she didn't mean anything——" Hilary began, placatingly.

"I ask you!" Dora interrupted her sharply, "whether a married woman is expected to give up all men friends for ever! Men don't do it, and why should women? Craig is making a fuss about nothing——" She fell silent, and there was a pause.

"Dora had Madame von Hinz do two miniatures of her, and gave one to Cecil Atherton," Craig explained, suddenly. "I may be old-fashioned, but I object to my wife making herself—— However, I won't discuss it! I am going to my club, and whenever Dora wants me to come back she knows exactly what to do!"

"Yes, but, Craig—but, Craig——" Hilary pleaded, anxiously. "There was nothing in *that*. Women do give their pictures——"

"Well, then, don't count on coming back, Craig!" Dora, who had sprung out of bed, and was sweeping about in a loose, lacy wrapper, said, ill-temperedly, interrupting her sister. She moved to the mantel, snatched down a large letter that stood against the clock, looked at it fretfully, and flung it into the fire. She was standing, with one bare, thin young arm resting

against the mantel, and her brown eyes looking stormily at Craig from under a cloud of tousled hair, when he abruptly left the room.

Hilary, who felt as if hope and joy and youth were for ever dead between them, remained standing, aghast, in the pretty disorder of the sun-flooded bedroom. Dora had really attempted that poised and ready evasion yesterday! Dora! The gold-and-crystal clock ticked with punctual gaiety; the wood fire snapped and crackled, and the shafts of sunshine found Craig's big photograph, on Dora's dressing table, and brightly touched the serious handsome face in the heavy silver frame.

Dora was breathing hard, her face looked dark. She poked the end of a burning log with a pink satin mule.

"Butterfly, are you crazy?" Hilary asked, at last.

Dora shot her a resentful glance.

"Please, don't you begin!" she said, rudely.

"Why, Dora, I don't know you!" Hilary reproached her, tenderly, sitting down beside her, and taking possession of one of the soft, boneless little hands. "I can't understand you. If Craig were unreasonable, if he were merely cross—but what could be more reasonable than that he shouldn't like his wife to give another man her portrait—why, that was a terrible thing to do, sweetheart! And I can't think what possessed you to do it, either," continued Hilary, coaxingly, as if to a very small child. "Why, I don't know what you were *thinking* about! Craig was so pleased with your thought for him, too—— And by the way," she broke off to ask suddenly, "how did he find out? Did you tell him?"

"No, it was that idiot of a man I had frame it," Dora said, vexedly. "I deliberately didn't take it to Tiff's, because I thought they might recognize me. I went to this other place, and I no sooner had the order placed than this creature said to me, 'It's Mrs. Craig Spaulding, isn't it?' I warned him—but you know what they are! The next day he calls up the house here, to ask if he shall mail the package, and if I want it insured, as Mr. Atherton is not at his club! Cecil was up in Rhinebeck. Fool! Craig was at home, it was just after breakfast, Christmas Eve, and he took the message. And Craig waits all this time, two whole days, and broods and rages, and works himself into a fever—I won't stand it! What I do is none of Craig's business——"

"It's very decidedly his business what his wife does," Hilary said, gently, as her sister stopped short. "You're too young, Butterfly, you're too pretty——"

"Oh, heavens!" Dora exclaimed, almost at a shout. And immediately she called out to the invisible maid: "Yes, come in, Emma! Miss Swensen is coming at nine this morning, because I have to get out by eleven, so get my breakfast now, that's a good girl. I won't have my bath until she's done with me. And send Alice up with the letters——"

Composedly gathering her laces about her, Dora climbed back into bed.

"Don't worry, Sis," she said, reassuringly. "Craig and I are always having rows like this!"

But Hilary, going down to her own breakfast, worried profoundly. She was disappointed in Dora, and frightened for her; the whole sordid affair alarmed

her deeply. That it should be Butterfly—this lovely, cross, unreasonable little woman among the pink-and-white pillows! And that Craig should take this schoolgirl nonsense so seriously! There was never any real mischief in Dora.

Craig was gulping the last of his coffee. When the man-servant was out of the room he said briefly and composedly:

"I wouldn't let myself worry, Hilary. She'll come round. It makes me pretty sick that she could do it, but Butterfly's only a child, you know. It's Atherton——"

His tone grew suddenly grim; he stopped.

"Craig, you can't think that she wants to marry him?" Hilary asked, trying to make her laugh sound reassuring.

"Marry him!" Craig said, contemptuously. "How on earth could she marry him? He hasn't a cent—his brother sends him a check quarterly. Archer met him in Flanders, during the war, and he's staying with the Archers up in Rhinebeck, to get over being gassed, or trench feet, or something. He's been here six months or so now; he said quite frankly the other day that he had to get a job or go home—came down to see me about it in the office. He dances, of course, and he plays tennis and golf, and Dora thinks that America ought to have a leisure class! Why, his whole estate, his brother's estate, wouldn't pay her servants!"

CHAPTER XV

Hilary felt a deep relief sweep over her. She dressed, a little later, for a morning down-town, sending no word to Dora, and making no attempt to see her. Dora's nearest and dearest disapproved of her, and it would not hurt her to know it.

The holiday reaction had set in; holly wreaths looked oddly out of date in the shops, and customers and saleswomen alike yawned and blinked wearily. But Hilary enjoyed poking about the snowy streets; she walked briskly, and the crisp air brought a bright glow to her cheeks. All night long she had been tossing and restless, worrying about Dora. Now the sun was shining again, and Craig was philosophical and strong; matters would somehow settle themselves, and life would go on.

She amused herself, in this unusual solitude and freedom, with a dream of what life would have been if she, Hilary, were Mrs. Craig Spaulding, and beautiful little Dora only making a visit to her sister. Hilary imagined her own pleasure and satisfaction in the power and dignity of such a position. How simple it would be to love a good and generous man, to make his home a charming and comfortable place; to fill the sunshiny old nursery with delightful babies; taking them to the quieter beaches, or to the big mountains for long, country summers; to be, in a word, what Mrs. Craig Spaulding should be, a worthy successor to

all the good and honourable women who had worn the name. All this hysteria of dances, of artificial beauties, of late hours and of too much smoking and drinking and eating, led to these wretched complications; sex was always there, just under the surface, ready to work its usual mischief with the quiet course of life. And if this was Dora's point of view at twenty, what would Dora be doing at thirty, and at forty?

A tall man, with a foreign-looking coat buttoned tightly about his thin figure up to his big fur collar and smiling dark face, stopped her on a crowded street corner. She looked up, bewildered; then her whole face lighted.

"Kronski!" she exclaimed, delightedly, holding out her hands. "I didn't know you were here! I knew that you were coming some time in January, but I hadn't seen anything more! When did you get in?"

For answer, still beaming at her in utter content, he drew out a big, round, old-fashioned gold watch, and showed her ten o'clock with a gloved thumb. Now the city's whistles were all shrilling for noon.

"What, just this morning?" the girl exclaimed. They had drawn a little apart from the crowd, and now again he grasped her hands. Hilary, with a vague recollection of the proprieties, attempted faintly to disengage her fur-lined gloves from his.

"Now, but why do you do that?" he asked, with his amazing simplicity. "This is a friend's good hand I hold. Do you think I am so rich in friends? Yes, I am just from the boat," he told her. "I do not have any Christmas dinner. I don't eat on the boat. It is all too rich—it is meat, meat, meat. I don't like it,

and so I will not eat it! I go to my hotel, he brings me a card, I see it is all the same. Beef, mutton, chicken—they are all alike! You know Norway! Ah, where I have been last summer—do you think I do not cook? Yes, I cook well!"

"That's sacrilege, you cooking!" Hilary protested. "Suppose you burned your hand?" she asked him. But immediately the maternal concern that was always ready to fill her thoughts became uppermost. "Then you've not had any breakfast?" she demanded. She looked thoughtfully down the street for a second frowning and biting her lip. "If I can only remember —where *was* that——" she mused. And then briskly she nodded. "Come with me!"

"Ah, the good little mother, she says: 'I will take care of you, I will not let you suffer!'" Kronski said, delightedly. "But I am meeting my friend—Von Mandescheid, here at the bureau of the oculist!" he remembered suddenly.

"Who is Von Mandescheid?" Hilary asked. Kronski raised scandalized brows.

"Yes, that is the American lady," he said, impolitely. "She makes dresses, she talks all the time,and she does not know who is Von Mandescheid!"

Hilary had moments of bashfulness with other men. But this man had always seemed to her only a little boy. She looked at him reproachfully.

"Are you being saucy to me?" she asked, gaily.

"Yes, I am being saucy!" Kronski said, pleased with a word that was somewhat unfamiliar to him.

"Well, tell me, then, who is Von Mandescheid?" the girl demanded.

"But he is the great *kappel-meister!*" Kronski exclaimed, aghast at her ignorance. "Only he is now old, and he will do no more work. The war has made him a poor man. Seventy-eight years he has, and he is my good friend—my *maestro*, who put the hand in his pocket when Konrad Kronski was a dirty little boy with nothing in his belly, eh? So he comes to America with me, he works with me, and some day he shall try a concert here, and then you will see what a great conductor can be!"

They were walking up the Avenue as they spoke; Kronski's lean long arm guiding Hilary at the crossings, and both entirely oblivious of their surroundings. Now Kronski plunged into an optician's shop, and here found his valet, with the gentle, white-headed old musician in tow.

Hilary took the veined old hand reverently; the rheumy, bright old blue eyes looked at her with affectionate tears. Konrad put a filial arm about the thick overcoat in introducing Von Mandescheid; dismissing the valet, and beaming with sympathetic joy as Hilary addressed his companion in his own tongue. The girl saw a flowing full beard as soft and white as milk, a venerable forehead under a foreign-looking round cap, and pink, healthy old cheeks wrinkling with a great smile. Von Mandescheid wore a brown knitted muffler and thick knitted gloves of a rich green colour.

Kronski entered into the subject of the new eyeglasses with passionate interest, and when the aged man had sight again, and looked first from one face to the other, and then about the decorous handsome shop with delighted keenness, he and Kronski em-

braced each other in joy. He had broken his spectacles on the big ship; or rather the cow of a stewardess had set her great hoof upon them, Kronski explained, and he had been very unhappy.

They left the shop with the old man between the young man and woman, guided by their locked arms, and happy in their brisk conversation. Hilary led the way through quiet side streets to a restaurant of which Craig had told her some weeks before; he sometimes lunched there when he was alone, for the peace and quiet, and had praised the food.

Kronski showed great satisfaction when he saw that it was a Hungarian establishment, and the three settled themselves contentedly at one of the small tables, a table spread with an immaculate limp cloth and set with bone-handled knives and forks, cruets in blue glass, and high-stemmed tumblers pressed in lumpy designs. The waiter was not long in discovering that he was dealing with nobility, and immediately the proprietor dashed forth. Kronski stood up for what was virtually an embrace, and Von Mandescheid was welcomed with only slightly lessened warmth.

Hilary, receiving her share of the ovation with appropriate simplicity and pleasure, felt herself so thoroughly in the spirit of the hour that Dora and Craig, and everything worrisome and unpleasant, was forgotten, and she laughed with sheer delight in the absurdity and yet charm of the occasion. The long, plain room was almost empty; sunshine struck in through the old Nottingham lace curtains that screened their table from the street; the air was warm and fresh.

And the food, when it came, was delicious even to her,

and to her companions evidently a genuine feast. They knew all the dishes; could discourse upon them with the chef, who came out of his kitchen to be sure that all were satisfied, and Kronski's frank gluttony was somewhat excusable in Hilary's eyes when old Von Mandescheid assured her that "the boy" had not eaten a full meal for nine days.

"But tell me all your plans!" she had said, before this, and Kronski, resigning the bill of fare into the hands of his new friend the proprietor, launched into them with enjoyment.

He was to play with the symphony societies here and in all the big cities, on such and such and such dates. And then he was to give two concerts in March; he took a list from his pocket, and Hilary studied it with him interestedly. Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia might then each have a concert or two, and then, when he came back, perhaps the big farewell concert, in April.

And then to Norway again, and to his beloved beaches, where he could cook and tramp!

Meanwhile Von Mandescheid, upon whose old hand he laid his as he spoke, should stay in New York; Kronski's manager had rented a studio here, did Hilary know the Berringer studio, in Fifty-ninth Street? He had just been to see it. He had brought his cook, and while he was away Von Mandescheid would keep house, "like the kind wife that waits at home," he said, and perhaps take a few pupils for the violin, and perhaps play with the symphonies.

"You weren't here last winter?" Hilary said.

"You weren't here last winter? As if she did not know it," echoed Kronski, scornfully. "Come, you

don't know whether poor Kronski is here or not," he rebuked her. "No, I am in South America last winter, and also I am in Italy," he told her. "But I am here two years ago, and you don't come to see me—you burn the Amati for stovewood, perhaps?"

"That was the first winter after Butterfly's marriage," Hilary said. "She was abroad until Christmas. I knew you were here, and I did mean to hear you in Philadelphia, but that was a lonely winter for me . . ." She had begun with a smile, but now to her own surprise her voice suddenly thickened and her lower lip shook violently and uncontrollably. She had to stop, or begin to cry.

"She weeps that she loses her sister, the beautiful sister has been married," Kronski explained to old Von Mandescheid, in German. And very softly he brushed Hilary's cheek with his fur cuff, and showed her the bright tear shining on the fur. The older man patted her hand tenderly, and made a little clucking, sympathetic sound in his throat.

Well, they were like a pair of absurd, primitive children, of course, Hilary thought, laughing, and quite frankly drying her eyes. But something about their foreign simplicity was wonderfully touching and sweet after the dry insincerities of the life she had been leading for several weeks, and after the solitude of Mount Holly. While they attacked their hot, strongly seasoned food, and gratefully drank the strong, highly flavoured coffee, she told them about Dora. Kronski remembered Craig well, and asked naturally how their baby was?

Hilary shook her head. No children.

"That is bad," Kronski said, simply. "If ever I have a beautiful wife, she shall have children—eight, ten. Then if she lies awake and sighs in the night, I know what she is worrying about! It is Nini, that her teeth do not come through, or it is Toto, that he has broken Papa's favourite bow! The women," Kronski finished, wiping his black up-flaring moustache with great sweeps of his thin little red-monogrammed napkin, "the women, yes. We must have them; we do not care about them! They are soft, they are pretty, they cry and we give them jewels and furs. But the wife," he added, with sudden emphasis upon the last word, "ah, that's different! She shall be always good, always simple, always loving. Yes."

Hilary reminded herself that she must not judge this man by American standards. His passionate devotion to his art was Kronski's reason for being; she knew in looking at his keen, thin face that his own capacity for emotion was all absorbed in his work. His very disillusionment with life, his years of bitter poverty and struggle, would save him from even the weakness of a Cecil Atherton, and from all the playing with realities that made Dora's set so sensual under their fragrance and beauty and softness and daintiness.

"Kronski," she said, suddenly, struck with a heartening thought, and perhaps reminded of Dora by his oddly pertinent views of wifehood, "if my sister comes to you, would Herr von Mandescheid teach her?"

"I offer it three years ago, I am not to change this offer," Kronski said, magnificently, with his mouth full. "Who is now her teacher?"

"She hasn't touched her violin, to work, for almost

two years," Hilary confessed, ashamed. Kronski merely scowled his contempt, shrugged his shoulders, and went on eating.

After lunch they went up to see the studio, Hilary as gaily at home with these two as if she had known them all her life. They were real, she thought, studying them in the taxicab, and listening to their talk about some new opera. Kronski wanted a theme; Hilary, who had the score on her old square piano, at home in Mount Holly, could supply it. The old man was ecstatic in his admiration; he talked to her of the opera, and almost immediately afterward made her laugh by telling her pathetically that a hole was worn in one of his socks, and the toe had worked through, and was being chafed.

The studio was magnificent; an immense room with a high ceiling and north windows twelve feet tall. Outside these windows were iron balconies, and below them the grim, leafless park, with children screaming on the ice-pond.

Inside was a tremendous and soothing bareness; one great dull rug stretched at an angle on the polished floor, one or two great unframed canvases on the dull, distempered walls, and two enormous iron candlesticks beside the big fireplace. Trunks stood about in the process of unpacking, and four men were grunting over the business of setting up a concert grand piano.

Hilary and the men went back through the little dining room and kitchen; looked into bedrooms, small but flooded with sunshine in the early afternoon. Kronski's handsome leather bags had been opened; the whole place was littered with a bachelor's odds and ends.

When they went back to the studio Hilary sat down

at the piano, dusting the long bench with one of her gloves, and striking the keys with all the delight of the artist. Von Mandescheid came to stand beside her, humming and marking time, and Kronski, who was in the hall with the movers, rushed back, and seized his violin. She gave him his string-notes expertly, improvising little flights of chords and runs between the whining of the altered strings, and when they laughingly went through the sonata movement into which she had drifted, Von Mandescheid kissed her clever fingers reverently, with all the respect of one musician for another.

But Kronski could play no longer, his manager was announced. Von Mandescheid went off to change his stockings, as he explained, and Hilary went out into the Avenue again. She wished that Kronski had not said to her awkwardly, when the manager was announced: "Here, I cannot talk to you any longer, and I cannot ask you to remain, because my cook and valet are unpacking, and there is no place for you!"

It was only his European frankness and simplicity, of course; she knew that she had given him a happy hour or two, and that he had thoroughly enjoyed the meeting and the late breakfast, as she had. But she wished he was not quite so foreign!

CHAPTER XVI

WALKING down the crowded street, at half-past three o'clock, Hilary felt a sudden exhilaration in her veins. She thought of Dora's problem, but it was in a new way, it was with a certain confidence and strength. Dora was wrong, and she must be prevented from doing this sort of thing again. It was preposterous to have Craig, and to have Hilary herself, trembling and worrying over what Dora chose to do or not to do. Butterfly was a woman now. Hilary had worried about Dora all her life; had carried a double responsibility for all the twenty years of Dora's life.

Now she suddenly felt free and powerful. Her unexpectedly empty day had been filled independently of Dora, and delightfully filled. Had Butterfly accompanied her this morning, all this pleasure would have escaped her. Dora had small interest except for her own small crowd; she would have greeted Kronski apathetically, she would have satisfied herself with merely giving him the address of the restaurant, if indeed her concern for his hunger had gone that far, and she would have then abandoned him, and asked Hilary indifferently if they had better go to the club for luncheon, or if they mightn't telephone someone to meet them at the Ritz?

"Dora makes a great mistake," Hilary decided, bracingly, smiling at her own trim reflection in shop

windows. "She is pretty, but where would she be if she and Craig had a serious split? Back in Mount Holly with me, and I can assure her," she continued, argumentatively, "that she would not find it all so easy and pleasant as it was! I'm nearly twenty-six, I'm no child, and I certainly shall not take Dora's side unless she comes to her senses and acts like a sensible woman."

This emancipation from Dora come to her suddenly, with all the exhilaration of a discovery. She had been too much wrapped in Dora's life; praying for her, awaiting her letters, talking to everyone she knew only of Dora! Kronski, to-day, had been frankly disgusted with Dora, a girl who inherited her mother's gift and her mother's Amati, and who allowed years to go by without improving her opportunities.

"And if he knew that it was Bobby Wendell and Cecil Atherton who were taking up her time," Hilary thought, "he would be even more disgusted!"

She went into the house breezily, at four o'clock. Mrs. Spaulding was at home, Banks said, and would be glad to see Miss Collier in her room.

Dora was lying on the big divan before her fire; she had been crying. She said her head ached, and she thought Craig ought to be ashamed of himself for behaving so! They had had a dinner engagement with the Rogers' to-night, and he had telephoned Mrs. Rogers that he would be out of town. And he had moved into his mother's empty room; so idiotic, raged Dora, letting the servants suspect everything!

"You are the idiotic one, Butterfly," Hilary said, sternly, remaining on her feet, and looking at her sister with disapproving eyes. "I'm surprised at you—I

can't tell you what I've been thinking about you all day. A woman your age, and married two years, letting herself be involved with a whipper-snapper like Cecil Atherton! Craig's quite right; and if you don't like being his wife, and behaving yourself as his wife, you ought to go about the thing decently, and not in this shilly-shallying way! You ought to get that miniature back from Cecil Atherton, and tell Craig that you'll drop him."

Dora sat erect on the davenport, putting her feet slowly on the floor. Her eyes did not leave Hilary's; she regarded her sister with utter stupefaction. Once or twice she half-opened her mouth to speak, but the rush of Hilary's eloquence silenced her, and Dora stared on; her white cheeks gradually assuming a most uncomfortable red.

"Don't think," Hilary said, well-warmed to her task, "that if you are foolish enough to leave Craig Spaulding I shall be delighted to have you come back to Mount Holly. I shall be bitterly ashamed. I love you, Dora, I have always loved you more than anything else in life——"

She felt herself breaking a little, and steeled her voice. But the little hint of tenderness entirely overwhelmed Dora, who flung herself face downward on the davenport, wailing like a terrified child.

"Oo—oo—oo-oo-oo!" sobbed Dora, choking and gagging in her utter abandonment. Hilary took a step toward her, drew back the hand that had always gone about the little figure in hours of bitterness, and that moved involuntarily toward her now, and, turning calmly, left the room, closing the door gently behind

her, but not so gently but that Dora heard the sound. Hilary, her heart beating fast, went to her room; and as she took off her street things, and settled herself on her bed, with a new book, she reflected complacently that there was great refreshment for the soul in this honest dealing, and that in no case could this little dose of moral medicine do Dora anything but good.

However, the mood of serenity did not last; and suddenly Hilary discovered that she was understanding not one word of what she was reading, that her heart was beating fast and uncomfortably, and that the room was icy cold.

She leaped up, turned the wheel of her radiator, and slipped into her big woolly wrapper. As she did so Alice came softly in, with an armful of light wood, and quickly laid a fire.

"I wish you'd go to Mrs. Spaulding's room, Alice, and ask her to come in and see me," Hilary suggested, after thought. The flame was leaping cheerfully now, and Alice was moving about lighting the lamps and turning down the bed.

"Mrs. Spaulding went out about half an hour ago, Miss Collier. She didn't have her car, I think she called a taxi," Alice said, with the mild relish of her class for the troubles of others. "Mr. Spaulding's home, and he's in the liberry. Mrs. Spaulding didn't take no suitcase nor anything with her——"

"Why should she?" Hilary asked, repressively. She opened her book as a gentle hint for silence from the loquacious Alice, and apparently began to read. But she was in a state of anxious misery, and was glad when the girl was gone, and when she need no longer

hide the agitation she felt. Six o'clock, and Dora out in the dark winter night; going somewhere in a taxi-cab! Poor little Butterfly, hurrying away somewhere, into what folly and trouble?

Hilary went to the dark windows; the panes gave back only a reflection of her comfortable room, with the little tongues of the fire leaping brightly, and her own tall figure in the big white wrapper with the loosened cloud of coppery hair. Even though a neighbouring window showed here and there a warm oblong of dull red, she could see nothing between; the street was a black chasm.

Uneasily, she shut it out, and dressed for dinner in one of her dark-blue corduroys. The clock was striking half-past six as she went downstairs. She asked Banks in an undertone if Mrs. Spaulding had returned.

"No, Miss, not yet," Banks said, with a cautious air of not overstepping a discreet ignorance. "Mr. Spaulding went upstairs to dress quite a while ago."

Craig's dressing, however, had evidently been as brief as her own; he was in the library now, and looked up from a sheaf of letters as Hilary came in.

"Don't get up," she said, sitting down. And immediately she asked him: "Craig, do you know where Dora is?"

He looked at her gravely, folded a letter and put it back into its envelope.

"No," he answered, briefly and unencouragingly.

"But where can she have gone?" Hilary went on anxiously; almost as much alarmed by his manner as by Dora's non-appearance.

"I don't know, Hilary," Craig said, wearily. "I can-

not always—understand—Dora. Emma says that she went out at half-past five——"

He sighed heavily, and did not complete his sentence. Hilary knotted her hands in her lap, and forced herself to sit still. She looked from the fire to the clock, and back again. Seven o'clock. Craig went on with his mail with an impassive face; the big house was still.

"Craig, I really can't stand this!" Hilary said.

To her relief he seemed as eager to break the silence as she was.

"I've been wondering," he said, uneasily, "what we can do?"

"Oh, really!" Hilary burst out. "Butterfly shouldn't scare us so!" Craig looked at her, half-smiling.

"I don't think I ever heard you criticize Butterfly before," he said.

"Oh, but I think she is entirely wrong in this!" Hilary assured him quickly. "Only," she added, smiling herself at her own lenience, "I don't think—truly I don't, Craig—that she has the faintest idea how—how silly a thing she did!"

"Neither do I!" he agreed, decidedly. "I wish to God she'd come home!" he added, getting to his feet and beginning to walk about the big room.

The clock struck half-past seven, and Banks came decorously to announce dinner. Craig told him simply to wait for Mrs. Spaulding and he and Hilary resumed their seats. Hardly a full minute afterward there was a ring at the front door, followed by voices, by an ugly and growing confusion in the hall.

They had risen, at the sound of the bell, and were in the doorway; Hilary had a terrifying impression of

strange faces, and of a policeman's blue uniform, and of Banks' dignified resistance to what looked like actual rabble. Somebody—Butterfly—had stumbled in between the policeman and Banks——

"My God, what is it!" Craig said. Hilary heard Butterfly's half-laughing and half-crying voice:

"It's nothing—it's all right, Craig——"

"No harm done—the lady fell——" This was the policeman. Emma was on the stairs, shutting back a scream with both hands over her mouth. Hilary had Butterfly in her arms; Craig had taken her, staggering and limp, from the policeman.

"She's all right, no bones broken!" Craig said loudly. "It's all right!"

"Of course it's all right!" Butterfly sobbed and laughed, as Hilary half-led and half-carried her toward the library. Banks spoke to the curious crowd that pressed almost into the doorway, Hilary had a vague impression that Craig was giving the policeman a greenback; then the door closed.

Craig rushed to the davenport; he and Hilary lowered the hysterical Butterfly upon it; Banks fluttering about, as Butterfly sobbed, "like Marceline at the Hippodrome!" They stuffed pillows about her, and Craig told Emma harshly for God's sake to stop talking and go get Mrs. Spaulding some brandy.

"What was it, my precious, my darling?" he said, his arm about his wife. Butterfly tried to smile, and tried to say: "Why, it was nothing!" in a perfectly natural tone. But at the effort she burst out into genuine crying, unmixed with laughter, and buried her head in Craig's neck.

"Oh, Craig, I love you so—I love you so!" she sobbed. "I—I've had such a horrible day——!"

"Yes, I know, yes, I know, sweetheart," Craig murmured, his own face working, "but now it's over, and you're safe with Hilary and me——"

"Craig," Butterfly faltered, with brimming eyes and trembling lips, "never be mean to me again, will you? I can't—I can't bear it!"

"No, sweetheart, and I can't, either," he said, softly and tenderly.

Emma came in with the brandy, and Butterfly drank it, coughing and smiling. Her colour began to come back, and she looked like a lovely child as she lay against Craig's shoulder, with one hand held in both Hilary's hands as Hilary knelt beside her.

"It was nothing," she said. "But my taxi-man was drunk, and he frightened me so! He kept skidding, and cutting about corners, and finally I told him to let me out at the corner, right here, rather than come down our street. And just as I was stepping out, he jerked the car and started, and I fell down. I hooked my heel in the step, and couldn't get up, and then this policeman came, and all the crowd! I had lost my breath—you know the way you do?—and I couldn't tell him who I was for awhile, and he kept asking me who my father was! But finally I did say that this was my house, I lived here, and then it was all right!" She drew a long breath; looked restlessly about. "Where's my gold bag?" she said.

Hilary jumped to get it, lying with her furs and hat on the table near by.

"I got you something, Craig," Dora said, with a

sweet, wise, childish look. And, opening the bag, she put into his hands the little miniature. "I telephoned Cecil," she explained, "and said that I must see him, and see it. He had a six o'clock train to catch at the Grand Central, and he said he would bring it there; he was going up to Rhinebeck. So I met him, and we walked down toward the end of the station, and I told him how distressed you were—that you thought I shouldn't have done it, and he gave it to me right away. He seemed awfully sorry about it. But I want you and Sis to know," Butterfly added, looking seriously from one to the other, "that there was a sort of reason for my giving Cecil this. Madame von Hinz had said that she would do it for two hundred if she might exhibit it, and Cecil said that he wished I would let her copy it for him. Then Madame said that Cecil was going to have his brother and sister help her when she goes to London, and she said she would do it for one hundred, she giving her half, and I mine, as a good-bye present to Cecil. So that was the way of it! And I never thought how—how you would take it, until to-day. She *is* doing one for you, Hilary, and that will be exhibited, I think. And you can have that one, Craig," she added, with the adorable childish timidity that had been one of the old Dora's charms.

"It's the most exquisite thing I ever saw!" Craig said, kissing the original between her earnest brown eyes. "Now let's go out to dinner. Or shall we have them bring it here—wouldn't that be fun?"

"That would be delicious!" Dora decided.

The hours that followed Hilary thought the pleasantest she had ever spent in the Spaulding house. They

held for her not only the exquisite relief of realizing that all was well between Butterfly and Craig once more, but some new and infinitely comforting element as well. For the first time in their lives Dora seemed to her merely a normal woman; nothing mysterious, nothing perishable, just a human being, who was sometimes wise and sometimes foolish, but who would have to learn her lessons and pay for her mistakes like everyone else.

And with this realization Hilary suddenly felt a great freedom; she need no longer make Dora's happiness and Dora's safety her first thought. She had her own life to live, and a dozen long-cherished plans for living it. She wanted to go on with her music and her languages; not as Dora's coach and accompanist, but as Hilary Collier herself, an individual. And she decided once and for all in favour of the blue corduroy velvets.

Dora had protested against this favourite dress of Hilary's, not that it was not becoming and pretty, but that, Dora argued, Hilary could afford smarter garments now. But Hilary loved the little plain dress with its wide collar, and liked to remember the hard old days when she had chosen to wear it, year out and year in, from October to April, because it was so durable and so economical. She had bought the wide-ribbed velvet by the whole bolt, in those days, from a wholesale house, and had made the dresses herself.

She began to think with exhilaration of returning to the little Mount Holly office and all the pleasant associations and duties of her work. Her Canton tea-pot, her big Doulton cup, her piano with the dis-

coloured ivory on the high G, her marigolds and wallflowers in the kitchen window, all began to call her to a life that was her own, that did not involve pretences and affectations and surface emotions of all kinds.

CHAPTER XVII

"HILARY, you're absolutely a born old maid!" Butterfly told her, one Sunday morning when they were all at breakfast.

Hilary smiled over her grapefruit. Craig looked at her keenly; her beautiful, white musician's hands; her rich heavy braids of coppery hair; her white throat rising round and firm from the broad, frilled collar she wore; the wholesome fresh colours of cheeks and blue eyes and hair set off by the shadows in the dark blue velvet, and thought that he had never seen anything so domestic, so thoroughly womanly and wifely and motherly, in appearance, as Hilary Collier was at this moment.

"I don't know what I've got, mental science, or new thought, or what!" Hilary admitted, gaily. "But I just feel as if anything thrilling might happen, down in Mount Holly, and I be in it! I believe I've been too serious all my life. I think I'm going to be a giddy, flirtatious old lady! I can't wait to get back to work! I don't *belong* here."

"Hilary," Dora asked her, seriously, "don't you think rich people can have fun?"

"Yes, I do!" Hilary defended herself, as Craig shouted with laughter. "But as a rule, I don't think they do!"

"But why not?" Dora persisted. "They can *have* everything," she added, discontentedly.

"Yes, I know they can. But—well, I don't know how it is," Hilary said, thoughtfully, "but there doesn't seem to be any particular heart in it. I'm just speaking for myself, of course. I may be crazy——"

"You are," Craig assured her, smiling. "I don't get you at all. Now suppose that my father leaves me a million dollars, and doesn't leave my brother, or my cousin, say, a cent. Does that mean that my cousin is a better man than I am? Money is the greatest power on earth, Hilary; you can't do anything without it, and people don't respect you if you haven't got it!"

"On the contrary," Hilary protested, eagerly, "we get into the habit of thinking money is wonderful because there are just a few things that we *must* have, or die, and at present people have to buy them. Food, and shelter, and clothes—that's all. But the real things, service, and sharing, and working for each other, and love—that's *life*."

"And can't rich people love each other?" Craig asked, with the air of cornering her.

"No," Hilary answered calmly. "I don't think they can, not as poor people do, anyway, They don't have the same anxieties, the same sacrifices, or the same need for actually working for each other. Husbands and wives live one life, on a small salary, they need each other. But how much does a woman like Rose West need Walter? Not at all."

"Then you think people are happier slaving, and starving, and sitting up nights with sick children, and worrying over bills, than others who can give their children nurses and comfort and decent educations?" Craig asked.

"Well, I don't quite understand that," Hilary answered, a little doubtfully. "But I know this," she added, animatedly, "that when a woman gets up a Sunday dinner, and cleans all the children, and fixes the house, and makes the gravy the last minute, there is—there is *something* about it that makes it much more fun! I love to remember the first years after Father died, when Dora and I often used to wonder where shoe money was coming from, and when—do you remember, Butterfly?—we used often to bring back branches of dead wood, from Sunday walks, for the stove. Dora, do you remember the day we were absolutely loaded with wood—we kept piling it on to each other, Craig, and we were laughing like a pair of maniacs!—and we saw Cutler White and some girls from Philadelphia coming along——!"

"I remember!" Dora said, with bright, conscious colour in her face and an involuntary glance at the maid who came in with the rolls.

"I think you're entirely right, Hilary," the elder Mrs. Spaulding said, unexpectedly, looking sternly through her glasses at the rolls. "Bring me a piece of toasted brown bread, Banks," said she, majestically. "No wonder young Americans have no constitutions!" she interpolated dispassionately. "Coffee and hot pulp for the first meal of the day! Yes, Hilary, you're entirely right," she resumed. "I was speaking of that very same thing to Craig's father a few weeks ago. I reminded him of our early days, when our first baby came." Mrs. Spaulding did not even sigh at the memory of the little daughter she had lost more than thirty years before, but for a moment her fine gray eyes stared

into space. "Every detail of that little flat, of the baby's little double-gowns, I can remember to this moment," she went on. "The little meals we ate, the street-cars we rode upon, the bakeries where I bought bread—sometimes I can hardly bear to recall them, because all that was so vital and so wonderful to us both. But when Rodney began to make money, and this boy was born," she finished, with a sharp glance at Craig through her glasses, "we lived in handsome apartments, we went to California for a vacation, to Alaska, to Europe—all that's just a blank! I've forgotten it, just as we always forget what comes too easily to us!"

Craig looked at her in surprise; she did not often favour them with anything so closely approaching sentiment. Now she sipped her scalding coffee with her usual calm, determined air, and helped herself firmly to omelette.

She had unexpectedly returned from France a few days before, and planned to go back within another week. But meanwhile her visit was most timely, and had fallen in delightfully with the reformed routine of the household. She had found Butterfly at her sweetest and simplest; beaming from between Hilary and Craig on the pier, as the big vessel was warped into her dock, looking like a charming doll in her wide-brimmed hat and muffling white furs, and between Hilary and the elderly woman a friendship of several years' standing bid fair now to develop into something more. Mrs. Spaulding sat erect, and apparently aloof, reading through her gold-rimmed and jewelled lorgnette, in the evenings, when Butterfly and Hilary rambled through

one scrap of beautiful music after another, at the piano, but she did not miss one note, or miss the pretty picture of the sisters busy with their beloved instruments. Craig would lie back, meanwhile, in his deep leather chair, his tired eyes shut, his soul utterly at peace.

"Hilary has a marvellous effect upon her sister, Craig," his mother said, one evening, remembering her last visit, when Hilary had chanced not to be with them even for a night.

"Yes, I know she has!" he answered, quickly, trying not to look conscious.

"Very remarkable girl," Mrs. Spaulding said, eyeing him thoughtfully. "How did it happen you never admired her, Craig?"

"I don't know," he said. "I hope when she marries it'll be a man halfway worthy of her," he added, to break a possible pause.

"Mark my words," Mrs. Spaulding remarked, impressively. "When that girl marries, she'll marry well, it won't matter who the man is! She'll make him! She could marry Banks, here, and he'd turn out to have some unsuspected genius for invention, or surgery, or something! Talking about you," she said, giving Hilary's hand a pat with her own square, firm hand, as Hilary sat down beside her.

"Craig," Hilary said, eagerly, "don't you truly think that Butterfly shows improvement already, even after only three lessons with Von Mandescheid? I do, I think he's marvellous! You *will* keep her at it, won't you? When I've gone home?"

Kronski and Von Mandescheid had dined with the Spauldings ten days before, Kronski in rather an irritable

and unresponsive mood at first, and the old conductor obviously ill at ease in the strangeness of a large American home. But both had been soothed at finding a table set only for six, and the evening had ended felicitously with music, and music, and more music, Hilary in her element, and guiding and inspiring them all. She and Craig had gone out to forage for cold meat and rye bread and coffee at twelve o'clock, and her companionable chatter, her straightforward, busy efficiency, and her pretty housewifely anxieties to have everything right had quite warmed Craig's heart, in the kitchen and pantry that were almost an unknown region to him.

After this, Kronski had departed for his cross-country tour, and Butterfly had settled down for work in good earnest with Von Mandescheid. All this was tremendously satisfying to Hilary; her bright mood of satisfaction with life deepened and strengthened with the pleasant crisp winter days, and the arrival of Craig's mother seemed only one more tie in Butterfly's new domestic rôle.

"But I don't see why you should go back to that Mount Holly place, Hilary," Mrs. Spaulding protested now, seriously.

"That's what we tell her!" Butterfly added, affectionately.

"If she had any spunk at all," went on Craig's mother, "she'd come across to Paris with me. I don't like to travel alone, and it would do her good. How long since you were in Paris, Hilary?" she asked, calmly.

"Oh, years—twenty years! I was a child," Hilary,

answered, breathlessly, while Dora sat up straight, with Craig's arm still about her, and Craig turned to his mother a surprised and amused look. It was not like her to make such a remark in jest; indeed, there was an extremely determined expression now upon her florid face and about the lines of her rather harsh mouth.

"Come along, Hilary," she said. "This is Saturday, and I sail Tuesday——"

"Oh, Mrs. Spaulding!" Hilary gasped, "you're too kind, but I *really* think—of course, I'd *love* it——"

"Take my advice and go," Craig said. "You don't know my mother! You'll have the time of your life!"

"Oh, but honestly—but I never dreamed—but, Mrs. Spaulding——!" stammered Hilary. "Why, I—— But *Paris!*" Her accent on the last word made them all laugh; but Dora's laugh was over a sudden little jealous pang. Of course, she and Craig had had actual months in France; of course it was coming to dear old Hilary—but—but—but——

And Dora really suffered in the next three crowded days when they all went down to Mount Holly in the car to see John Spaulding, and when Hilary laughingly promised him to be back before the first cherry was ripe, and when they rushed through shops buying pleasant-smelling leather things, and a woolly plaid, and the big soft warm tan coat that was Mrs. Spaulding's gift to her guest.

To see them off, in the delicious bustle of sailing, to peep into the wide, airy cabin with its two mahogany beds, to push about the narrow, clean white iron passages with other furred and murmuring leave-takers was bad enough. But it was really hard for Dora to

go off the steamer, and to stand on the cold pier, while the rail above her, and Hilary's bright face under a fur cap, and framed in furs and violets, faded from view. Craig's mother, red-faced, firmly wrapped, and looking unusually stern in an extremely unbecoming travelling hat, looked down from beside Hilary, and on the other side of her sister appeared the pleasant, rosy, extraordinarily clean face of Cecil Atherton. The bugle would blow for lunch now, Dora thought, and they would go downstairs and begin to identify faces and find their places! And then they would be tucked up until tea-time, on deck, glancing at each other's novels, and looking at the rise and fall of the roughening sea, and talking.

She had said to Craig, when Cecil came up to them on the deck, that she was delighted that he happened to be returning to England on this boat. Hilary did not especially like him, but Craig's mother did, and he would be useful to them in all sorts of ways. She had lost her fancy for Cecil; with the humiliating event of the miniature it had all seemed flat and silly under Hilary's and Craig's scornful eyes.

But it was dull and dispiriting to go meekly back home to a late luncheon this morning, and to think of the thrills that life might have, and didn't have. Dora dozed after lunch, and had a good hour of hard practice with her violin. She came down to the car at five minutes before four, with the brown leather case under her arm.

"To Herr von Mandescheid's, please, Bacon," she said to the chauffeur, "and wait for me there; I'm having a lesson!"

Her pretty face was sober, as she looked out of the car at the jumbled traffic of the snowy streets. What was Hilary doing now? What fun she would have in Paris, with her French, and her passion for little adventures! Here in New York there was nothing to do; no new thrilling singer at the opera, no new plays that tempted, no new people.

She opened the studio door with her usual bold and ungrammatical greeting for old Von Mandescheid, in his own tongue.

The old man was at the piano; there was another man in the room who pulled his long lean form out of a velvet chair and flung back his mane of heavy, long black hair.

Kronski had come back!

CHAPTER XVIII

HILARY, with only a delighted woman of sixty for her companion, had exactly seventeen enchanting days in Paris, three in Switzerland, and fourteen in Spain. The new laced shoes with rubber soles needed mending, and the new brown coat needed a new pocket and a trip to the cleaner by the time that, exhausted with pleasure, she came smiling aboard the *Olympic* at Cherbourg in the romantic twilight of a mellow March evening for the trip home. Hilary had tramped, poked, investigated everywhere; she felt herself insatiable for travel.

"It must be my mother's French blood," she said, animatedly, to the elderly English surgeon, and his young son who were changing all preconceived ideas about American women because of her, and to the French colonel with one arm who was seriously considering offering her the protection of his other arm for life. "I just—well, I *was* Paris. The bread, and the streets, and the gray sky, and all the bare branches in the Bois, I—I didn't see them, or like them, I *was* them —I breathed it all in! I found my mother's sister, you know, and my cousins, and imagine—they have an adorable little hat-shop, near to the Madeleine, and they gave me this hat! Wasn't it sweet of them? They wouldn't hear of my paying for it. And Didi—that's the little one, wanted me to meet her fiancé, and

they were perfectly charming to me. And I met the old man who sold my mother the Amati—after her first concert, her fellow-pupils with Gerbeau all helped give it to her. He's still selling violins, but he's never had another Amati! I only wish—I only *wish* my sister had been with me!"

But she remembered, even as she said it, that Butterfly had been for weeks in Paris without displaying any anxiety to discover her mother's old affiliations there, and that upon one of their happiest trips in Spain, in answer to Hilary's longing cry of, "Oh, how Butterfly would love this!" Mrs. Spaulding had said sensibly:

"On the contrary, I don't imagine Butterfly would get any pleasure at all from a trip like this with an old woman! There must always be something more with Butterfly!"

"Something more than what?" Hilary had asked, really concerned.

"More than everything!" Butterfly's mother-in-law had answered, shrewdly. "It was Craig, and all the novelty of married life, for awhile. But now there's a longing for some other gown, some other company, some prospect ahead that is just a little more extraordinary, something that some other woman has!"

"You *do* understand her!" Hilary had conceded, sadly, struck with the truth of the picture.

"I understand her type; there are thousands of her," Mrs. Spaulding answered. "Nothing stable, nothing habitual, in their lives. God preserve them from routine—from one moment's dependence upon themselves for amusement! A book must be easy to read, a play must shock, an opera they clip at both ends, for

fear of being bored! I don't know where they're getting to, I'm sure."

"I think Butterfly will outgrow it," Hilary had said, with a sinking heart.

"I know she will," Mrs. Spaulding had answered, bracing her instantly. "Some women make a break, rush through all the stupid forms of a divorce, and settle down with someone exactly like, or even considerably less attractive, than the first husband. I've seen it a hundred times! But Butterfly won't do that; she'll have her fling, and have her babies, and she and Craig will begin to grow up. Don't look so serious, Hilary; I blame Craig at least as much as I do Dora!"

The old woman kissed her good-bye at the train; there were actual tears in the small, sharp gray eyes under their heavy black brows.

"Good-bye, child. I wish I had kept my first two little children," said Grace Spaulding, at parting. "I would have liked a daughter like you, or a son to marry you to!" Hilary carried these words with her in a dancing heart; she felt, and everyone who listened to her felt, that there had never been so delightful a holiday.

They were presently watching the islands and shore of Manhattan take shape in a gray, rain-swept harbour; Liberty held aloft her torch in greeting, and Hilary remembered her father holding her at the rail of a rolling little French steamer, almost twenty years before, and telling her that her mother's country had given the great statue to his own.

Tugs fussed out to meet them. Hilary, writing ad-

dresses and moving restlessly and smilingly to and fro, marvelled that an absence of only seven weeks could earn so delicious a pain of homecoming. She was not hungry, yet it seemed long since breakfast; she was not nervous, yet these preliminaries to getting ashore seemed endless.

Presently, with an involuntary cry of joy that surprised her, she saw Craig waiting on the pier under a quivering umbrella, and studying the lines of the decks with patient eyes. Her cry died into silence, and she felt apprehension clutch at her heart; something was wrong. Oh, where was Butterfly—where was Butterfly? If he were meeting her to say that Butterfly was dead——!

The holiday mood dropped from her like a mantle; she leaned over the rail, and in a high and anxious voice, fortunately lost in all the joyous uproar about her, and the piping of gulls overhead, she called:

"Craig! Craig!—here I am!"

Whether he heard her or not, his eyes at that instant found her, and his whole face brightened as he waved his arm. And a moment later she saw Butterfly, charming in a new spring suit, and with pink flowers in her hat, waving vigorously from the shelter of the long shed on the pier.

They were both smiling—they were both all right—Hilary told herself, running downstairs to snatch her hand-bag and to hurry to the gang-plank where her fellow-travellers were herded like sheep. But what an odd, troubled look he had worn!

Nothing was said to explain it. She was the first through the customs office, they were rushing her to

the big car, they had settled her inside it, and were holding her hands, and pouring out joyous nothings, as they threaded their slow way through the traffic in the streaming rain.

Then she was home again, or at least in Butterfly's home, and Craig had gone off to the office, and they could have talked freely if there had been need. But Butterfly seemed to have no confidences; she was bright and sweet and interested, reported herself as busy with her music.

"Butterfly makes us all ashamed of ourselves," Violet Vanderwort, who came in for tea with a dozen others, said admiringly, later that afternoon. "She's going to play in the Russian Charities Concert with all the professionals."

"Butterfly!" Hilary exclaimed, in delight. "What shall you play?"

"Konrad said to wait until you got here, Sis, and then we could go over everything and decide!"

"Konrad?" Hilary echoed, pleased with the little indication of friendship. "You do like him, don't you, Butterfly?"

Long afterward she remembered the odd look that Violet gave her. Violet, who was stretched rather than sitting in a big chair, and whose costume was a poem in mauve and heliotrope, with heliotrope feathers hanging in a delicate fringe from her mauve hat, broke the ash from her cigarette with a polished little fingernail, and asked negligently:

"Did you think Butterfly didn't like Kronski?"

"Well, she never liked him *much*," Hilary answered, innocently, wishing Violet would change the position

of her silk-clad knees just a trifle before Banks came in with the tea.

"She's gotten bravely over it," Violet said, quietly, in her hard little voice.

"Lay off Butterfly, Vi!" Cy Dwyer said, good-naturedly. His sister gave him a contemptuous smile. "Kronski is the whole cheese," Cy added, for Hilary's enlightenment, "you never saw anything like his concerts! Strangling room only—he's given two extra ones——"

"Three," Butterfly said, quietly, not raising her eyes from the spout of the big brass samovar. "Give me a saccharine tablet, Cy, I'm getting grossly fat!"

"You!" Cy said, incredulously. For Butterfly was almost of an unhealthy slimness. But he passed her the little white bottle nevertheless. "Here's Craig!" he added, as Craig came quietly in. "England's taken the tax off tea, Craig. Have some?"

"Hello, everyone!" Craig said, stopping to kiss the pretty nape of his wife's neck. "This looks sociable! It's a long time since you've all drifted in like this, it seems to me!"

"Because of Dora's disgusting industriousness," Rose West said. "Since Christmas it's been practice and lessons, and practice and lessons, until it makes one sick!"

"Practice in what, Butterfly, and lessons in what?" Cy asked, idiotically.

"Exactly!" Violet murmured, with her little laugh.

"She has to have a lesson at five, she has to meet old Doctor von Something-or-other at five," Rose continued. "It's ridiculous! If you can't support

her, Craig, let her do something easier than concert work!"

"And if Doctor Something-or-other isn't there, sometimes Kronski himself takes you on for a lesson, doesn't he, Butterfly?" Violet suggested.

"Sometimes," Butterfly admitted, serenely.

"She's a good worker," Craig said. "What are you laughing at, Vi?" he added, in faint displeasure, as Violet released a silvery little peal of laughter.

"No, but tell me, how is Kronski as a teacher?" Hilary asked, interestedly. "I've often wondered. Is he cross, Butterfly?"

"He was the other day," Dora answered, quietly, smiling as at an amusing memory. "Von Mandescheid told me that the other morning the cleaner came, and Konrad said to him: 'Those things on that chair!' I don't know where Muller, the valet, was. But on the chair was an exquisite old piece of oriental embroidery —a mandarin robe, I think, that hadn't been cleaned for two thousand years! The cleaner went off with it, and ruined it, of course, and Von Mandescheid said that there was a regular scene! Let me hot it up for you, Vi——?"

"No thanks, my dear, perfect!" Vi said, watching her steadily. "I'm getting to like tea," she went on, stirring it lazily. "Craig, does your wife let you go to luncheon with pretty divorced ladies?" she asked.

"If I ask to!" Craig said, laughing.

"Are you trying to be rude to me?" Violet drawled, her eyes half-closed as she looked at him. "Don't you think that I could interest him through one luncheon, Dora?" she asked.

"Why not try it?" Dora suggested. "If it bored you, you might skip the dessert!"

"I shall. I want to talk—music—with Craig," Vi said. "Shall I call you up, Craig?"

"Better let me call you," Craig amended. "At your mother's house?"

"No, I have little diggings of my own," she said, lazily gathering up the slim brown neckpiece and her gold bag. "Come to the door with me, Craig," she commanded.

Craig obediently rose and escorted her from the room. Hilary, still feeling the slow heaving motion of the sea under her, and pleasantly tired, was pleased to sit silent, enjoying the comfort and beauty of the big room.

She handed her cup to Dora, who was talking over her shoulder to Rutty Davenport about his etching exhibition in an Avenue shop, when Butterfly, taking the cup, and still with smiling eyes on Rutty, said levelly, in a clear, low tone:

"Sis, go break that up!"

For a second Hilary was utterly confused. Then she understood. Leaving her chair, with an odd little sensation of fright, she went casually into the hall, saying to Cy as she reached the doorway:

"I'll get my book. I want to show you how French I look when I go to races!"

Craig and Vi were near the front door, the woman looking straight up into his eyes with a look she was furious to realize that Hilary saw, Craig smiling down at her with his usual tolerant air, his hands in the pockets of his coat.

He was delighted to see Hilary, kept her with an arm wound through both her arms, and drew her into the conversation.

"Fire him then, Vi, and try again! Discussing Vi's Filipino cook," he elucidated, to Hilary.

"Craig, I'm afraid to!" Violet pleaded.

"Then get Cy to do it!"

"Cy! If Cy is good for anything on earth, I don't know what it is!" his sister said disloyally. "Well, if my body is found in Park Avenue some day you'll know I tried to fire Bonifacio!" she said, departing. "Good-bye, Craig, don't forget the luncheon! Good-bye, Miss Collier. So glad you had such a nice trip!"

She ran down the steps and jumped into a waiting limousine. Craig looked at Hilary with a grin.

"What do you make of her?" he asked. "She's a wonder. I don't trust her as far as I can see her!" And immediately, pausing at the foot of the stairs, he added in an undertone: "How does Dora seem to you?"

For answer she looked at him expectantly, faintly frowning.

"I can't—put my finger on it," he said. "But I'm worried about her. She works, she seems wrapped up in her music, she's perfectly well—but—well, I don't know! Maybe it's you she wants; she seemed a different woman when you were here! It couldn't be—Atherton?"

"Oh, Craig, no! Why, that wasn't a real affair at all," Hilary said, positively. "Just foolishness, and just beginning, anyway. He crossed on the steamer with us, you know, and he's only a *kid*. Why, one day he spoke to me about that miniature affair, seemed

embarrassed and ashamed about it, like a boy! He said, 'I never would have asked her for it if I'd stopped to think for a minute—I wouldn't have Spaulding think I was getting up wind for the world!' That's the way he felt about it—just that he had presumed."

"Well, maybe you can find out what's the matter with Dora, if anything is!" Craig suggested.

"Could she be jealous of Vi, Craig?"

"Of Vi? Why, I never see her!" His open amazement was the most heartening answer Hilary could have had; and she went upstairs smiling. But she sighed as she reached her room, nevertheless. The heavy, threatening something that had hung over this house at Christmas time seemed to linger here still: misunderstanding, secrets, conspiracy. Hilary already felt apprehensive, jaded, and as if the laughing, joyful mood of the last few weeks belonged to some other woman. Was Dora—was Craig—was something wrong? Why had Dora feared what Craig was saying to Violet in the hall? And why had Craig looked so grim upon the pier?

And to-morrow was Mount Holly and work again.

CHAPTER XIX

Hilary reached the office in the little New Jersey town at noon the next day, and prepared to take up the dropped threads with a courageous heart. But the more than ten weeks' holiday, even in the dull season, seemed to have had the effect upon her work of water that closes smoothly over a sunken vessel. John Spaulding had been perforce gracious with his imperative sister-in-law, and Hilary had had her trip. But Grace Spaulding was not here to act as intermediary now, and the full unpleasantness that her inconveniencing him had caused him was awaiting Hilary.

On her desk were some forty disputed letters; fully half of them should have been answered weeks ago. And in the office where old Kraut still grunted and mumbled, a dapper young man, whose favourite word was "efficiency," had been placed. Mr. Eddy was just out of college, and he was a favourite already with old John Spaulding. It did not make Hilary's hard first day any easier to have this youth respectfully informing her about matters hitherto entirely in her charge. And it was late in a chilly, windy spring afternoon when she discovered that his salary was already more than her own. She walked home feeling sore and depressed.

Hilary always thought of her little house with deep affection and even homesickness when she was

away from it; but it was very dirty now, cold and empty and uninviting. The piano was still covered with a pink-and-white blanket, and the trunk that had seemed so deliciously new and smart a few weeks ago merely seemed to taunt her, with its foreign hotel labels and its scraped and marred sides.

After these luxurious weeks, there seemed to be an astonishing amount of work involved in the getting of a cup of tea and the making of a bed. Hilary burned her wrist, and got her hands raw and dirty. Then there was no hot water, and the bathroom was cold and smelled of plaster and lead pipe. She wanted to cry herself to sleep. Instead she got into bed with a hot-water bottle and a book, at nine o'clock, and philosophized herself into calm.

After that everything went better. She slept well, and her solitary little breakfast was immensely to her liking. And Mr. Eddy proved a zealous youth, and not entirely lacking in humour.

And then, before things were fairly running again, and before the first cherry was ripe; when the early currants and asparagus were beginning to turn the wheels of the packing plant, and the familiar sign "Fruit Hands Needed" was hung outside the ice-house, John Spaulding was stricken in his full-jowled, ruddy-cheeked middle-age, and everything was consternation and excitement.

Young Mr. and Mrs. Craig Spaulding immediately came down from the city, to be in Mount Holly "during our esteemed fellow-townsman's indisposition," as the paper said. They took a delightful furnished bungalow out on the race-track road, and beautiful little

Mrs. Spaulding, "one of our own girls," as the paper added, began to flash about the familiar roads in her roadster. She brought only two servants. "We are camping, and we simply adore it," said Dora to Hilary, in one of their first happy hours together.

She was gracious to the townspeople who had snubbed her in her girlhood, only a few years before; indeed she was brightly gracious with everyone, and especially gracious with Craig. Hilary, at first, felt that her own cup of happiness was too full.

Things were going better at the factory than ever before. Old John had been a conservative, had hated advertising; but Craig immediately placed the "Garden Gold" brands upon the market, and Hilary began to see whole coloured pages displaying the "Garden Gold" apricots and peaches in all the magazines. A rival factory near Burlington, which had featured the "Top O' the Tree" fruits, began to feel the effects immediately. These were good enough, Hilary conceded, but they could not say "Spaulding Brothers" at the bottom of the can.

She softened even toward Mr. Eddy; they really needed him now, with Kraut getting so old, and he deeply appreciated her favourable word to "Mr. Craig." Her own position was certainly the most important in the factory, except perhaps that of Craig himself. They worked together splendidly, really enjoying the emergency, and the sense that from the chaos they were steadily bringing forth success.

Meanwhile, Dora was charming. She had told Hilary that there was no news; yes, Konrad and old Von Mandescheid had gotten off late in May; but

they would be back in September, and meanwhile she would work faithfully. Her concert appearance had been all that she hoped; nobody said that she was going to set the river on fire, but he was satisfied, and that was all she cared about.

"He? Oh, you mean old Von Mandescheid?" asked Hilary, combatting a little hurt feeling because Dora had not given her, who had watched over so many years of practicing, the first thought.

"Yes, I mean him," Dora answered.

How the summer rushed away Hilary did not know. It was boiling midsummer, and they were spending their Sundays at the quiet beaches beyond Toms River; it was sticky, humid August, and Dora had gone with the Morrills, Craig's cousins, for three weeks on the Maine coast; it was September, with no relief from the heat except the incontrovertible relief that the mere tearing of the calendar's pages gave her.

And always there was that odd brightness and sweetness about Dora. Hilary, after the first few weeks of their reunion, came to feel her old dislike to it, her old fear of it. What was Dora thinking about while she stood, swaying slightly, with the Amati resting against her soft cheek? She gave no clue.

But on a certain warm September evening when they were all in Hilary's little yard, idle after a supper that was almost all salad and iced coffee, still at the table, and talking on into the dusk, there came an interruption, and—to Hilary—awakening at last.

Kronski had come to find them; just as he had come on a winter night so long ago. He was earlier than he expected to be, in America, his ship came in to-day, and

to-morrow he left for three weeks of Canadian shooting, with his good manager. And then, in October—concerts! And he fiddled upon an imaginary violin as he mentioned them.

He sat down, between Craig and Dora, with Hilary opposite. And Dora looked up at him, with her brown eyes flaming in the soft half-light. She had hardly spoken, she was not smiling, she was only breathing a little rapidly.

"And so, have we been a good child? Have we been working four hours every day?" he asked, suddenly, looking from one sister to the other with his quick, boyish smile.

Hilary, putting a tall clinking glass of iced coffee beside him, nodded and smiled, and as he drank it off with a long wet gasp Konrad laid over her hand for a moment his own nervous, lean, keenly tempered hand, with an affectionate pressure of acknowledgment.

She went back to her place, conscious of an odd tumult in her breast. It was certainly not pain, and yet there was terror and a sort of heady fright about it; her breath caught treacherously, and a queer lightness, almost a giddiness, seized her.

The men were discussing Balkan politics; Dora, with that odd, wise, watchful smile in her eyes, was listening quietly. Hilary could lean back in her chair, unnoticed, and asked herself what had happened to her.

The last of the afterglow died out of the pink and blue sky that showed above the old wall; the motionless leaves of the elm were silhouetted against it in rich full green. Mingling with the exquisite, tremulous twilight came the first stars, steady in the pale sky, and

before they saw the moon itself delicate moonlight was creeping over the garden.

Hilary looked at Konrad, who was talking animatedly, and said his name to herself, as she might have put out her finger, as a child, to receive an electric current. With the name the strange new feeling shook her again; her heart soared and seemed to float above her body; she wanted to laugh, to cry, to stay for ever sitting so, breathing the soft, airless warmth of the dying day, and the rich heavy odour of the wallflowers and the dusty peaches. A delicious langour ran in her veins, and all the world seemed for a few beautiful minutes as it had seemed to her when she was a child, seemed simple and fascinating, and without fear. She remembered the first arrival at this house, with her father and mother, long ago; Dora was a big, serious baby in a shabby little blue coat then. Hilary's mother had given her bread and milk on the doorstep, in real French peasant fashion, and Hilary felt to-night that she had never lost that child's simple relish for bread and milk, or pleasure in coming from the grimy city to this sweet open place.

"What is the matter with me to-night?" she asked herself, coming back to a sober study of Konrad sitting there in the dusk. He was only a clumsy, big, delightful peasant, in spite of his genius, but she liked him so much! He was a sweet boy, she told herself, and the pity of it was that they would spoil him, all the silly women who flocked after him, and probably he would marry one more bold and less scrupulous than the rest, and so spoil his whole life!

"But come, if you've only an hour, aren't we going to

have some music?" she demanded. Kronski shrugged rebelliously.

"I am perfectly happy!" he protested.

"You come *straight* to the piano," Hilary decreed, rising, and holding out her hand. He took it, smiling as they went into the warm dark house.

"Yes, Mother, I will be a good child!" he said, obediently. The sudden candlelights revealed her smiling approval at him, and the instant he touched the Amati she knew there would be no further demur. "Ah, what hands—what hands!" he cried, as the first fiery rush of notes echoed through the old room; "why cannot I take those hands of yours with me wherever I go! Come, I obey you. What are we to play?"

Hilary, always in serious earnest at the piano, answered only with a nod of her coppery crown toward the music-rest; they were off upon an ecstatic flight of sound, Konrad's pale face shining in the candlelight as he bent over her shoulder, Hilary's beautiful mouth tense, her blue eyes flashing like sapphires.

When they had finished they both burst into a great relieved shout of laughter; Konrad frankly wiped forehead and throat with a big silk handkerchief, his eyes never once leaving the piano.

"Please—please!" Hilary whispered then, breathing like a runner. They began the second movement, and Dora saw Konrad's lips twitch under the upflaring moustaches as his bow twitched.

Dora and Craig were in the gloom of the wide-opened window, seated upon its broad sill. Dora was silent, her eyes upon the players. Craig watched the street, where listening forms were gathering, and presently

turned to Hilary, making to-night for the first time a certain discovery about her.

"Butterfly temperamental!" he mused. "Why, it's Hilary who is the genius. And she's—by George, she is beautiful!"

She was always at her prettiest at the piano, anyway; there was a sureness, a dash and brilliance, about her. And to-night, her white fingers racing with Konrad's bow, her exquisite colour flaming against her white skin, and with the candlelight touching her crown of hair, she was actually lovely. Craig noticed for the hundredth time the clean line of her rounded chin with its hint of a cleft, and the purity of the white, round throat. How she had flung herself into this music; there was something inspiring in the mere sight of it.

"Lord, Lord," thought Craig, almost a little shocked at the rush of passionate sound, "she's asleep now. But if she ever fell in love——"

The music ended upon tremendous and marching chords; Hilary let the last one die into perfect silence; Konrad's head, flung back for the last long-drawn note, dropped forward again, he gently laid down the violin, and Dora, wondering, saw that her sister's eyes were brimming with tears.

"Ah, Konrad—that was music!" Hilary faltered, smiling.

"Bravo!" he said. He had taken off his coat, for the evening was insufferably close, and now he took her hand, and laid it upon the thin, soaked silk of his shirt. "Do you see that I am working hard!" he exclaimed, with boyish pride.

"Oh, Konrad, you *enfant terrible!*" Hilary reproved

him, with her motherly laugh. Dora had gone to the piano, and now she picked up the violin with an expectant look. But Kronski, still panting, shook his head.

"No more—no more! We must not spoil the perfect thing!" he said, towelling vigorously with his handkerchief. Dora, looking a little surprised, a little hurt, came slowly back to the circle, and sat in the chair beside him. Craig had gone out, with his usual brotherly concern for the comfort of them all, to find some ginger ale. But Hilary, as she herself sank into a seat, saw in the soft candlelight that Dora's soft little hand dropped against Kronski's, and curled there as if it had found a resting place it loved.

And then she knew. It was all suddenly clear. This was the explanation of Butterfly's serenity, her sweetness, her silences. She had been dreaming of Kronski, all this domestic, contented summer. Hers had been the subtle complacency of the secretly loved woman; it had been the memory of Kronski that had kept Dora happy through the blazing midsummer days and the long quiet evenings of talk, and the Sunday cruises in the car!

She looked at Dora, at Craig with his honest, handsome, intelligent face, bent concernedly over the ice and the glasses, and at Kronski, the big, clumsy, lean, eager man, with his boyish rages, his boyish vanity, his boyish eagerness for affection. He was rude sometimes, he was greedy and impatient sometimes, he was rarely reasonable——

Yes, but he was Kronski. And Hilary fancied that it was a maternal emotion that made her eyes a little dim

as she smiled at him, and her throat a little thick. He was too sweet, too oddly pathetic and helpless for life to spoil and ill-treat. He had called her "Mother," and had said that he would obey her! Nice boy that he was!

"No, Butterfly," she said in her heart, slowly sipping her iced drink, "you shan't play with him. You shan't hurt Craig and me and yourself with any such nonsense! He doesn't love you, and it's ridiculous to pretend about it. And I like him—Mother and Father told me about him when you were only a baby. He's *mine*."

CHAPTER XX

"And now what?" Hilary Collier asked herself, when a hot, damp, breathless, and sunless morning succeeded the night, and she found herself still oddly happy in the memory of that amazing hour with Kronski. For the mysterious emotion lasted, and deepened, and strengthened, going with her like an invisible aura throughout all the commonplaces of her day.

She dressed with a certain electric interest; there was something new in life. She found herself consciously enjoying the touch of silk stockings, the brushing of her masses of hair, and the frail stiffness of her dark swiss office dress. She dreamed smilingly over her breakfast, and as she went through the garden, in her wide, shady hat, pinned a great, heavy-headed rose against her frilled collar.

The day steamed with sickening heat, and the workers in the packing plant panted and grew pale in the heavy, sweet odours of cooking peaches and tomatoes. Great vans of tomatoes were aligned in the shady street; the ranged boxes giving a brilliant note of colour, between the white fences, and under the drooping trees. Hilary, from her office window, could look down and see the packers coming out for occasional whiffs of the cooler, or rather the less stifling, air; now and then somebody went for ice, and they laughed and danced about

awkwardly with its melting frozen particles on their fingers.

Craig, cool in brown linen, was in high spirits. His stewardship of the Mount Holly offices had been remarkably successful, and now that his uncle was beginning to come down to regular hours again, he felt that he had earned a vacation.

"I've got a great plan, Hilary," he said, boyishly. "I'm going to take Butterfly to Hawaii in October; we've been sweltering here for four months, and it'll do us both good! Now why don't you make arrangements to be transferred to the city office? Miss Rosenkrantz is going to be married; I was just asking Uncle John if I mightn't have you. Now that we've moved so much of the office work to town. You live with Dora and me; she works like a tiger with Kronski. You and she can keep up your music as you always have——"

Hilary, who had heard the first of his speech with a slow shaking of her head, was arrested by Kronski's name. Again she felt last night's odd little pleasant prick at her heart. In a sense, he did belong to her; her mother had been his mother's friend. And he was such a boy—he would get into all sorts of troubles in the strange city. Butterfly, too. What could be more wholesome for Butterfly than to have Hilary there, gradually weaning her to care less for the artist and more for the art? What music—what glorious floods and oceans of music they would have!

"Craig—if you're sure you want me?"

It was as simple as that. By night, the hot sticky night that closed the smothering day, everybody in the office knew that Miss Collier might be going to the city

office, soon, to be nearer her sister. Hilary felt as if it was all predestined, and Dora, drifting idly into the plant at half-past four, showed only an apathetic interest.

"It's the only sensible thing for her to do. Honolulu? I don't believe there's any really cool place in the world!" fretted Dora, who looked listless and pale. The evening that had so exhilarated Hilary had left Dora vaguely depressed; the reality of her dream, the actual flesh-and-blood Kronski, was infinitely less satisfying—or at least had been so last night, than the summer's wonderful thoughts of him! Last night he had seemed so far away, so much the peasant, so healthily interested in them all——

That was it. Dora could not forgive him for not singling her out, for not meeting her in the reverent mood of devotion and tenderness in which they had parted. That parting——! How it had thrilled her, for days after his ship had sailed! She had gone down to the vessel without telling Craig of her intention, a demure little figure in white linen, with roses wreathing her brown hat, and while the reporters and the moving picture men, and all the casual crowd of his friends—his manager, his professional associates—had taken their turns at saying farewell, Dora had been near him, smiling that wise, cryptic smile.

The Painters had been there, and Cy and Violet, and the Wests and Katrina and Jim Clarke. All these had laughed, and said the usual things, and—eyeing Dora a little surprisedly, or jealously, or suspiciously, as the case might be—had gone their way. And then she and Kronski had made a little tour of inspection together,

had looked into the writing room, "where I shall write the Butterfly letters," he had said, and into the card room, "where they will take away all my money!"

Dora had felt no fear of betrayal then; she had felt bold, confident, defiant. Let Violet, or any one else, tell Craig if she pleased, it made no particle of difference! She had stayed with Kronski until the last bugle, and then had drawn herself close to him with a little shudder; he had seen that he might kiss her—their second kiss—and he had kissed her, but in a hurried and casual way, fearful that she might really be too late in attempting to go ashore.

But by that kiss she felt she had committed herself; let the world howl now, the die was cast! Let Craig discover everything, let the inevitable unpleasantness begin, she could not stop it now!

It had been a little disconcerting to realize, as the placid weeks of summer went their way, and as Craig and Hilary plunged into the Mount Holly problem, that there was to be no tragic dénouement, for a time, at least. Violet did indeed find an opportunity of informing Craig that his wife had seen Kronski and Von Mandescheid off on the steamer, but Craig received the news only with a regret that he had not been there, too.

"You made my apologies, you said that I was busy, Butterfly?" he had said, unsuspiciously. Dora had been conscious of something like an impatient discontent with his very amiability.

But she had comforted herself with memories; she had kept warm and sweet in her heart all the hours—they were not many—that she and Kronski had had

together. First, those three marvellous lessons, beginning the very day that Hilary had sailed for France.

Depressed, discontented, envying Hilary her strange power to be happy, Dora had languidly pushed open the studio door. She liked to remember the hour that followed. Old Von Mandescheid had been there, at the piano; Kronski idling before the fire.

Did it begin that day, the caressing voice, the eloquent glance of his eyes, the occasional touch of his long, nervous hand? No, that day they were only master and pupil; it was the next lesson that suddenly the personal bond leaped into being between them, to turn those hours into magic, and to make every word, every glance, every lowering of eyelashes or mere crossing the floor, a miracle of enchantment.

To stand at the window with Kronski, looking down at the shy approach of spring, in the park below; to walk down the blazing Avenue, in the April sweetness; to linger over chocolate in some shop scented with the delicate perfumes and delicate garments of women; to tear open the occasional notes in violet ink—this had made a new world for Dora, and all summer long she remembered it, and hungered for it.

She had been to two symphony concerts in that wonderful time; he played for all the world, this lean, slender, black-haired man, with the big nervous hands; but he looked at her while he bowed and while he tossed back his heavy mane, and after the concert it was with Dora that he laughed and discussed the whole matter.

They had been alone only once in the studio; and that day he had kissed her. Von Mandescheid had left the

room for a few moments, and Dora, holding her violin, had been almost in the curve of Kronski's arm, looking up at him as he guided her fingers into a certain position. She had smiled, shakily, wistfully, and immediately, with a little laugh, the black head had stooped, and she had felt the quick touch of his lips.

That was all. Von Mandescheid had come back, and Kronski had sailed the next day. Dora had wondered a hundred times what that kiss would have been had she not had the Amati on her shoulder, had the old concert master not returned?

What did she want? She did not know; she never attempted to analyze the affair beyond the emotions of the moment. She wanted more stolen, delicious hours of music and friendship, she wanted more of Kronski's masterful, strangely thrilling society, she wanted again the delicious sensation of watching him on the concert platform, watched and admired by thousands, but thinking of her! There was a constant hunger in her heart and soul for a renewal of those wonderful spring weeks; if she thought of Craig at all it was with a sort of impatience, it was too bad to hurt Craig, but he did not count, after all!

And when she said to herself, as once or twice she did say: "What am I thinking of? I am a married woman. Nice women don't do these things!" the words seemed to have no meaning. It *would* have been disgusting for any other woman, twenty-one years old, and with a husband as fine as Craig, to indulge in these affairs; but somehow it was different in Dora's case. It did not fit into any general classification; there had never been anything quite like it. She was not like other

women; how many girls of her age had been marked from their birth, from before their birth, by this strange gift of music; had been associated by dying parents in babyhood with the name of a great musician who had later come into their lives?

Leaving Craig, divorce, desertion—Dora never thought even of the words. The topic was confined to herself and Kronski, her own little person, as she visualized it, swaying with the Amati on its slender shoulder, and Kronski's figure, dominant, masterful, male.

To-day she felt cross, defrauded, and disappointed. She had not had one moment's solitude with Konrad, and now he had gone off into the North with his manager. There had been nothing last night to refresh these memories, grown faint with the long weeks. Dora, headachy and dull, remembered to-day that Kronski had not sent her those promised letters during this time. He had sent postal cards, ridiculous pictures in rich colour of porched and peak-roofed hotels, and of stone warriors holding in prancing steeds against the staid old trees of parks. He had even sent Hilary these!

Hilary's serenity, as contrasted to her own deep restlessness and ill-humour, annoyed Dora. She was vaguely displeased even by the thought of Hilary's coming to the city. Dora had already planned exactly the frock, the mood, and the hour in which she would see Kronski again. She would wear the new white gown with the dull pink silver embroidery, and the pink and black hat. She would drift into the studio at about twilight; there would be tea; other

women might be there then, but they would go away, one by one, and Dora would stay on, talking, with her arms dropped between her knees, and her head drooping, and her eyes raised only now and then to meet the ardent eyes so near her. The white and pink, or, if it was evening, the marvellous black and silver.

This prospect seemed menaced with Hilary in the city. Hilary was sharp-eyed, she was uncompromising. She certainly would bitterly disapprove of this deliberate campaign——

Well, so would Dora disapprove of it, ordinarily. But this was not an ordinary case. If only, she thought impatiently, Hilary and Craig weren't always *watching* her——!

Meanwhile, Konrad was many miles away, and much water was destined to run under Dora's little bridges before she saw him again.

Firstly, there was Rodney Spaulding's sudden and desperate illness in Paris. Craig rushed to his mother's side only in time to see his father once again in life. Dora and Hilary meanwhile moved into the city house; uncertain as to what future plans might be, Hilary began what promised to be a long vacation. The white-and-pink and the exquisite silver-and-black gowns were refitted by the obliging Madame Emelie to Hilary's taller figure. Dora must wear black, for a few months at least. And Dora must refuse all social excitement for awhile.

In mid-September Craig returned, with his handsome, square, black-veiled mother, and Mrs. Spaulding immediately discovered a roomy, old-fashioned apartment in Fifty-eighth Street, put her two French

servants therein, and began to furnish it upon the pleasant principle of abstracting what she wished from her old home, and giving Dora a free rein with the replacing.

Dora was amused with the responsibility of buying furniture; she consulted decorators and designers; Hilary spent much of her time with the senior Mrs. Spaulding. Indeed, she was presently invited to make her home permanently with Craig's mother.

"I'm always out mornings, committees and nonsense," said Mrs. Spaulding, "you can practise then, or go to see Dora, or do what you like. And then we'll go over my letters, after lunch, while I'm lying down. I'm not nearly as unpleasant as most old women!"

"My trouble is," Hilary said, accepting gratefully, "that there are too many pleasant things open to me all the time!"

Dora, hearing her, looked sharply at her sister, and sighed. But the older woman was more in sympathy.

"You—twenty-five—is it? Twenty-six, then," she said, scornfully. "Wait until you're sixty-three, and want to live more than ever!"

CHAPTER XXI

One morning, while Dora was deep in consultation with an artist who was persuading her to let him plaster the dining-room walls with vari-coloured paints, and smear it into a semblance of old Italian distempering of soft grays faintly streaked with orange and pale blue, and when Mrs. Spaulding was attending a board meeting of the Wayside Shelter, Hilary walked up to the apartment, to see if the barrels of china from Quimper had arrived.

They had not. She comforted Germaine and Antoine with a few moments' chatter in their own tongue. Her mother had been a Lyonaise, certainly. Her grandfather had been Reni Charpentier, of St. Cyr.

Germaine and Antoine, stout, middle-aged women with hard red cheeks, were ecstatic. *Quelle miracle*—that Mademoiselle should know Lyon and St. Cyr! And to hear the beautiful French here in *Amerique!* She left them murmuring busily, and went out into the autumn haziness on Fifty-eighth Street.

It was the last week of the month; Konrad would be due in a few days now. Hilary walked around the corner to the studio, to see if there was news of him. He was to give his first concert on the third of the coming month.

Von Mandescheid greeted her delightedly; did she not know it? The boy was home, although out at this

moment. He had arrived yesterday morning, but he was so busy! Brown, yes, and rested, yes, but the telephone and his friends gave him no peace!

"And he is so cross!" further confided Von Mandescheid. "See here—and here—and here!"

Hilary went with him to the doorway of the little room behind the studio, a room furnished only by an immense desk and two chairs, and used by Konrad as a sort of study.

The desk, the floor, the chair, were all littered to-day with bills, circulars, letters; and upon the desk were two or three packages of unopened mail, for which he had had neither time nor patience. Hilary picked up a bill with a smile. She could imagine him, lazy after too long a holiday, and frenzied at the mere sight of all this work to do.

"He will let no one enter—he will let no one help him," said the old man in French, alarmed even by her touching one bill. "His manager sent a fine young man, no, that would not do! He says that he must look into his own affairs, that he is being cheated and deceived!"

"Boy!" Hilary said affectionately, leniently. "But this can't go on," she added, decidedly. "I am going to fix this, and he can quarrel with me if he likes!"

"His own letters, from one or two dear ones, these follow him wherever we go," said Von Mandescheid, answering an unspoken question in her heart. She had been wondering—but it could not be possible that Dora would be mad enough to write him!

Filled with enthusiasm and energy, Hilary plunged into the task. Duplicates, circulars, invitations to

invest, she unhesitatingly destroyed; invitations, long out-dated, she clipped together neatly to be answered. A few envelopes, one in Violet Vanderwort's hand, she respected. Bills she studied; caterer, jeweller, shirt-maker, tailor. The amount of money he made, and spent, took her breath away.

This was great fun, in the pleasant morning hours with old Von Mandescheid snoring gently in a chair in the adjoining room, and the bustle of the Park and the Avenue coming in at the wide-opened enormous windows, with the fresh autumn air. She hummed as she worked, to keep herself from being afraid.

Presently her heart jumped; Kronski had come in, and had evidently thrown himself into a chair, or upon the davenport, of the adjoining room. Von Mandescheid did not waken, and there was not a sound.

"Kostia!" Kronski presently shouted, ill-temperedly. "We do not desire to hear your beautiful voice!"

Kostia was his valet. Hilary was instantly silent; she began to fear that she had done a terrible thing.

How was she to let him know that it was not Kostia in here? How would he feel when he saw her going through his personal effects? Was there any way in which she could slip out unseen, leaving this ordered desk to tell its own story, and be her best excuse?

Her heart hammering, she boldly slipped a piece of paper into the typewriter. Instantly, with a rush of feet, Kronski stood in the doorway. His brow was a thundercloud.

"How do you do, I hope you are well?" he said, annoved and nervous, giving her his hand as she stood up

to greet him, his anxious and angry eyes hardly meeting her own, but travelling about the details of the desk. "Did Kostia put you in here? But he should not do so. I do not—I cannot allow—I have been working here with my papers——"

"I've taken the liberty——" Hilary began, with hot cheeks. She must stand her ground—she must force him backward——

"Oh, liberty, not at all!" he said, perfunctorily. "But I am a bad business man——"

"You are very bad indeed, Konrad," she said, maternally, over a nervous chill. She managed a friendly, easy smile. "But you cannot be everything. We will forgive you, because you are a genius. Now, sit down here——"

"I really cannot trouble you——" he was beginning haughtily, but she interrupted him pleasantly.

"Sit down here——"

"It is all madness—I cannot understand it! They say to themselves that they can cheat me, because I am a Russ!" he burst out, despairingly, dropping into the small chair that was wedged in between the desk and the wall, and so facing her as she sat at the desk.

"They don't anything of the kind, you poor, impatient boy!" Hilary assured him, soothingly.

"Look, look for yourself!" he cried, hunting for a particular bill. "Here—I tell this donkey of a man I will not have these shoes, I send them back! Behold them here, and this time in red ink——"

"Konrad," Hilary said, mildly, "if you would just look. This red means a *credit;* they are giving you credit. Do you see, down here?"

His face smoothed.

"The good little mother, she calls me the impatient poor boy!" he said, gently and contentedly. "And now she comes with the busy, kind hands, and makes all beautiful for me. These, shall I write to them? Katharine Barrison—I do not know you, Madame Barrison, but you would like me to play for your club? I will not play for your club, Madame——"

"That bunch are all old," Hilary said, taking it out of his hands. "You need do nothing about those. I will simply write saying that Konrad Kronski has been in Canada for a month, and regrets——"

"Rejoices——" he amended, in high spirits.

"Regrets that it is too late," she proceeded, smiling. "These I didn't open. And these are all formal invitations: dinners and things. You'll have to decide about those."

She was secretly amused at his casual glances at the letters; he tossed them aside carelessly.

"Burn them with the rest," he said. "About these invitations—who are these good people?"

"Why, I don't know many of them." She took them into her beautiful hands, shuffled them over. Konrad, in great felicity, listened to the names, commented upon the persons.

"They don't like me," he said, in sudden gloom. "But they like to say that I have been at their houses!"

The telephone rang, and with a shout of rage he snatched it. But Hilary interposed; took the message serenely. Yes, the telephone was very satisfactory; no, they had had no trouble.

"Now, I'll tell you what, Konrad," said she, "I'm

going to come in, every two or three days, and keep all this sort of thing straightened out for you. It's ridiculous for you to do it all, and it would be almost impossible for you to get a secretary for only three months or so."

Upon this beautific arrangement they parted, and Hilary walked home to lunch in high spirits. The air seemed full of delicious tang to-day, and the shifting of the brilliant autumn crowds about her filled her with sheer joy in living. Poor Konrad, she thought maternally, he was certainly not fitted for the material problems of existence. And fortunate Hilary, her thoughts ran on happily, to be the friend who could be so useful to him in his distress!

CHAPTER XXII

"Do you know, I like him, quite peculiarly," she confessed frankly, a few days later, when she and Dora had gone into the studio in the late afternoon to find a dozen other persons there. Fenton, the winter's favourite painter, an enormously fat, blond young man, was on the hearth; Violet Vanderwort was eclipsed in a big chair, her slim hands emerging with her tea-cup; Etelka Alexandrowska, a big Russian woman who had been a concert singer, and her pale little nervous husband were there; the vigorous Etelka at the piano with Kronski apparently quarrelling. One or two other persons were on the divan; among them, with his high laugh and confident chatter, Cy Dwyer.

Hilary had taken her tea from Kostia, with a nod of greeting, and seated herself on a sort of bench beside Von Mandescheid, whose head shook for a long time with a sort of benignant welcome, and whose eyes shone upon her affectionately.

"I really and truly like him," she said, dreamily, when they had all laughed at the battle-royal at the piano, and had contributed various anecdotes of Konrad's impetuosity. "He is so simple; he is not in the least spoiled. And that very thing makes him seem odd! But I do like him!"

"Now don't you go to telling us about Santa Claus next—Miss Collier!" Violet Vanderwort drawled. The

young man beside her, a pale, excitable writer of *vers libre*, laughed out with sudden relish.

"I'm a good woman, Audrey, I swear it!" shouted Cy Dwyer suddenly from the hearth.

"Santa Claus?" Hilary echoed, literally, a little at a loss.

"She means that we are *all* in love with Konrad, Sis," Butterfly elucidated, serenely.

"Speak for yourself, Butterfly," Violet suggested, sweetly, and the company laughed again. "Butterfly had it all her own way last spring, Miss Collier," Violet continued, lazily, "but now we are all in the field!"

"I'm not!" Hilary protested, smiling, and a little bit affronted at what she inwardly characterized as Violet's "commonness."

"What field are we all in, and what do you not?" Konrad himself asked, joining the group, lighting a cigarette, and looking expectantly about. "Do you know what this good friend does?" he asked them, glancing at Hilary. "She is my secretary—my banker, and my stepmother! She comes to my desk, and she plays upon my typewriter as she plays upon the piano!"

"That's nothing to do!" Hilary laughed deprecatingly as he stopped to puff at his cigarette. "I found his papers in the most horrible confusion," she explained to Etelka Alexandrowska, "and I run in now and then and set them straight."

"Why, how—how nice!" Violet commented, slowly, looking from one to the other.

"Nice, except that I am afraid of my stepmother!" Konrad said, gaily. When he used this tone, Hilary

was always ecstatically happy, she did not know why. She thoroughly enjoyed her rôle of guardian; even though there were moments when it gave her sharp twinges. If one of these managing women should get him, and ruin his life!

There were a great many women deeply interested in the violinist's life; she saw their letters, realized that almost every one of his free evenings was spent in one beautiful home or another, where every accessory of beauty and charm was rallied to win from him some special sign of friendship or intimacy. He was carried off for extraordinary visits, to Washington, where he met the Chief Executive, to the homes of the richest and most prominent persons everywhere. His was no ordinary life; there seemed to be a chasm between him and plain and simple humanity.

Dora had showed no uneasiness or resentment at the sudden transition of Hilary's mere acquaintance with him into something like an intimacy. Inscrutable, cryptic as always, the Butterfly played her own game. Hilary, she knew, was preëminently practical; to Hilary's balanced mind the confusion in his correspondence would be a real anxiety. Hilary had had years of keeping books; after all, it was natural that in this leisure time she should assume this little duty for Konrad.

But there were other difficulties in Dora's path just now. Her mother-in-law was at home, and her sister was with her at one time or another nearly every day. Unexplained intervals were not as simply managed as they had been last spring; Hilary had a maddening fashion of accompanying her sister to the studio, and

even old Von Mandescheid, hitherto the most discreet of companions, was always underfoot.

When Dora looked at herself in the mirror, confidence returned. Never was Twenty-one more blooming, more exquisitely soft and demure and winning. But there were other times when she felt that she was not gaining ground; indeed, that she was losing it.

In wonderful April and May, only four or five months ago, she and Konrad had found endless things to say to each other, all of themselves, and of love.

There had been no admission of feeling between them, to be sure. But they had indulged in those long, abstract arguments that are so sure a sign of awakening passion: the question of affinity, of whether a man loves as a woman does, of whether love in itself is not its own sufficient excuse, had engrossed them. With her bright head, in its beautiful spring hats, bowed, and her little soft hand tracing designs over many a tea table, Dora had mused, had looked up suddenly, had looked down again. And Konrad had moved his chair gradually nearer, while other tea guests danced or filtered away, and while the violets on Dora's breast wilted and died in a wave of exquisite perfume.

But there was little of this sort of thing now; the town was full of people; Konrad was getting better known every day; the danger of being recognized was far greater than it had been; and then there was Hilary. Dora, never dreaming of anything so crude as jealousy, nevertheless began to resent Hilary.

Hilary had an odd manner with Konrad; odd perhaps in being utterly and absolutely natural. She seemed, in some curious way, to take possession of him. Dora

could not define it, but she saw it, and she thought that others did. Hilary talked with him frankly, laughed at him, rebuked him, and criticized him, and would enter into long discussions with him that had nothing to do with personalities at all. About Russia, for example. Dora was sick of Russia! She had another annoying habit, too: that of babying him. She would ask him seriously what he had eaten for lunch—as if any one could possibly be interested in that! It amazed Dora to have Konrad quite as gravely tell her. To Dora he was a great figure; she wanted to keep him on his pedestal. Hilary, with her wholesome, commonplace, "everlastingly-bread-and-buttery attitude," as Dora characterized it, somehow made him seem less wonderful. Hilary, Dora decided, was hopelessly of Mount Holly.

"Don't use that expression, Konrad," she would say, "it's disgusting!" or, "Dine with that woman if you wish; but remember, *she's after you!*"

Konrad would laugh loudly at this.

"My stepmother is jealous to-day. Now she will send me out into the woods, and pay a woodchopper to kill me!"

"Jealous!" Hilary would tranquilly echo. "You think that because some women spoil you, we're all jealous!"

Dora would have given a great deal to be able to imitate Hilary's careless simplicity. But then Hilary did not know what love was! And whenever Dora sat in a box with Craig and her sister, and perhaps indifferent others, and saw the waiting lines of faces in the chairs below, and the lighted proscenium; when she

knew again the moment when the door in the scenery opened, and the applause began like a ripple, and broke like a great enveloping wave, when with his mane tossed back, and his keen, thin face half-smiling, and his bow and his violin held in his dropped right hand, Kronski came quickly and simply to the centre of the stage, and made his awkward yet unembarrassed bows to right and left—then Dora told herself that, alas, she knew what love was, and that she would die for him!

CHAPTER XXIII

"Hilary, I really don't think you ought to do it!" Dora said impulsively one day.

"Do what?" asked Hilary, over her toothbrush.

"Well—we are really no *relation* to Konrad, you know," Dora said, in her favourite tone of mild discontent.

"Relation! Of course we aren't!" Hilary exclaimed, at a loss.

"Well, you act exactly as if you were his sister!" Dora hinted, delicately.

"Poor idiot boy! I'd like to know where he would be if I, or somebody, didn't!" Hilary said, laughing. "He has the *weirdest* ideas! The other day I found him writing Mrs. Dwyer that he would come to her house, but that he could not eat her dinners, as they were too rich for him——"

"Well, he could get away with that!" Dora said, faintly annoyed.

"Of course he could! But the point is, that he *shouldn't*," her sister answered, vigorously. "If you could *know* the way women run after him, you'd realize that he could do anything, *now*," she said. "But it's bad for him to let them spoil him!"

"I suppose Vi's after him?" Dora hazarded, listlessly.

"I imagine Vi's after any one who could give her a

little excitement," Hilary conceded, tossing her masses of hair recklessly about. "But don't fool yourself, Butterfly. She's never forgiven you for walking off with Craig!"

Dora, who was perched on the foot of her sister's bed, watching the performance of her toilet, looked amused. It was late in a November afternoon; Hilary had come in, glowing and thrilled, from a symphony, and was dressing for an early dinner in the somewhat Bohemian ménage of the Alexandrowskis.

"I've often wondered if Craig sees it," Butterfly mused.

"No, I don't believe he does; I don't believe he even suspects it," Hilary said. "But everyone says that Vi went to California for her divorce with the full intention of marrying Craig when she came back. And just there you stepped in!"

"Vi and Craig!" Butterfly smiled. "She'd lead him a *nice* life! It isn't his money, either," she added, "for Billy Mann is rushing her now, and he's got scads, and besides, her father'll leave her lots! She must like Craig!" she ended, naïvely.

"Well, she could do that, and keep out of Matteawan!" Hilary countered.

Dora was still thoughtful, looking amused and interested.

"I can see what would fascinate her in Craig," she said suddenly. Hilary, now pinning a bronze net over her thick soft crown of braids, looked at her with sudden gravity.

"Butterfly, that's a remarkable thing for a man's wife to say!" she observed, reproachfully.

"Oh, I know it is!" Dora answered, childishly, with her eyes watering. "But I—I can't help it!"

"My darling, you *must* help it!"

"But, Sis," Dora persisted, after a pause, in which Hilary had continued her dressing, "you can't *make* yourself feel what you *don't* feel!"

"I think you can!" Hilary answered, positively, making herself look suddenly foreign, with the fastening of old-fashioned enamel and fringe earrings in her ears.

"Well, you've never been in love, and you've never been married," Dora reminded her, warmly.

"No, I suppose I haven't. And from the way you all act, I don't feel any particular call!" Hilary retorted, cheerfully. "Why on earth you can't be happy, and satisfied, and go on thinking about Craig as you did when you married him, I can't see! Any other man would be just the same, when the novelty had worn off, as far as that goes! And Craig is such a darling, so decent, and considerate——"

"Oh, decent and considerate!" Dora echoed, impatiently.

"Well, he *is*. And when some vamp like Violet really makes an impression on him you may wake up!" Hilary warned her, now breathless in an effort that twisted her like a contortionist as she fastened the silver-embroidered black velvet.

"Sis, you really are gorgeous in that thing!" Dora said, struck. "No, but when you argue that way, you practically make no allowance for—love!" she resumed.

"Love! Passion, curiosity, novelty!" Hilary summarized, briskly.

"That's nonsense!" Dora said, her face growing red.

"Love, my dear," Hilary began. "Oh, you too damnably beautiful siren!" she apostrophized herself in the mirror.

"Yes, you are simply gorgeous!" Dora agreed.

"Of a slimness!" exulted Hilary. "Of a subtle *beauté diable!*"

"Well, you are," said Dora, rebuking her levity. "Exactly that!"

"My zinn is zis," breathed Hilary, wringing her hands, "zat I haf lof too mush!"

"All right," Dora said, watching her half-enviously. "But you'll get yours some day. Someone'll come along, handsome, rich—and it'll be your turn! And then we'll hear less of love being all passion and curiosity and novelty!"

"When I think of love," said Hilary, still looking at her splendid reflection in the mirror, the sweep of thin silky velvet, and the plastered embroidery of silver grapes—"I never had a dress like this in my life—never!" she interrupted herself to say—"No, but when I think of love," she resumed, seriously, coming away from the dressing-table, and standing close to Dora, her blue eyes grave, "I think of poverty, Dora, of a young man and woman and their baby, of her cooking and planning for him, of his toiling for her—only afraid that if he died, something would happen to his wife and baby! I think of mothers all over the Union, saving up for school shoes, remembering that Mary doesn't like gravy, and that to-day is trial-balance day, and Father will come home tired! That's love, Butterfly. Why, Etelka and Vanni are old, in the late fifties anyway, and they're rich now, and yet every year or two they go up

to a little Russian town, where they lived when they were poor and young, and stand beside their first baby's grave, and walk about the little cottage whose walls they had to stuff with paper to keep the wind out in winter. I don't call what Violet does love," Hilary finished, with bitter feeling; "a few weeks of presents and compliments, and sex excitement, and then utter boredom, and hate——"

She fastened the rich, soft flexible furs about her, and picked up her gloves.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Sis!" Dora said, mildly, against her farewell kiss. "Will Konrad be at Etelka's?" she asked.

"I think so—late. He's to dine somewhere first, poor boy. And to-morrow the Dwyers carry him off for a day or two—they've been scheming it for weeks—and then his Montreal concert. The Dwyers are going up into the Adirondacks, skiing, you know, and plenty of liquid refreshment, and fires——"

"Yes, I know. Vi asked us!" Dora said.

"And plenty of Violet's favourite indoor sport, too!" Hilary laughed. "How she will vamp him, lacking Craig!"

"We may motor up Sunday, if the road's open, and stay Sunday night," mused Butterfly. "Craig isn't very keen, he says it hurts his mother's feelings—so soon. But I would, and take the violin, if I thought Konrad would really stay. But he's always rushing off just as soon as one arrives anywhere!"

"He goes to Canada Sunday. He doesn't get much out of it—— I look *too* grand!" said Hilary, tossing open her coat with a regal gesture, and haughtily

stretching her neck. "But Etelka loves one to dress, and we are to have music—there'll be a queer mob there, I imagine. Why don't you and Craig come in for awhile? And bring your violin, Butterfly. Everyone knows you've been working with Von Mandescheid, and mourning or no mourning——"

"Oh, there's not much fun in those crazy crowds," Dora complained, languidly, lifting her little form, in its pale pink and blue ruffles, from the bed. "I'll see how Craig feels."

CHAPTER XXIV

Hilary stopped in the drawing room for her music, passed Craig in the hall with an artless pause for admiration, and went joyfully on her way. The night was moonless, soft and warm, and the close low dome of the sky throbbed with winter stars. Her car slipped and bumped upon the thawing slush of the streets; the chauffeur's hands looked like a bear's paws on the wheel.

It was delicious, after percolating through the enormous bare odorous halls of what had once been a schoolhouse, and climbing the cold iron stairs, to open the door of the Alexandrowskis' studio and find herself in a tableau of rich colour, warmth, and fragrance.

The immense square room, high-ceiled and faced on the north by immense windows, was full of touches of Russian colour: rich oriental rugs, fretted brasses, tall enamel candlesticks, ikons in gold and red and blue. On the grand piano, and spread like a tapestry on the wall, were the stiff garments of priests, touched with the flaming red that shines like enamel, or like flayed flesh.

Madame Alexandrowska, swimming forward magnificently to embrace Hilary, wore over her old black satin a wrap of the same splendour; behind her Hilary saw a great fire blazing, with two or three forms silhouetted against it. Etelka junior, the orphan granddaughter, who was called Kasha in the family circle, was in evidence to-night for the first time at a formal

affair, and was aflame with excitement. She was a big, gawky girl, with passionate dark eyes, somewhat given, as Hilary knew, to socialistic discussions with pale, anemic youths, and to the defense of free love. But she was always shy and sweet and young with Hilary, whom she adored.

"And here is my beautiful musician!" exclaimed Madame, "and the music. She knows she will be sent home and to bed, like the bad child, if she does not bring him!"

She introduced Hilary enthusiastically to several dark, serious-looking men, and one or two eager, hungry-looking women in odd, home-made garments, with quick speech and slightly foreign mannerisms. Hilary, clinging to old Von Mandescheid's affectionate hand while she bowed and poured forth greetings in three languages, realized perfectly that to-morrow—or perhaps even in the course of the conversation to-night —she would learn that one of these men was a teacher of history in a public school, that this pale boy worked in Wanamaker's packing department, and wandered about through the old book-stores near Astor Place at noontime, chewing upon a herring sandwich, and that the blonde woman with the red-rimmed eyes was a retired dancer who drilled choruses for some musical show.

But she liked the Alexandrowskis' mixed acquaintance; the talk was fiery, inspired, and free, if the costumes were slightly unconventional, and she always felt more than ordinarily like taking her share in it, like contradicting, protesting, denying, and interrupting as spontaneously as the worst of them.

Etelka always began her dinners, however they might end, with a certain dignity, convention, and lavish display. The table was always most carefully laid, even though a predominance of small dishes and bowls of flowers, nuts, ferns, candies, pickles, little dark cakes, and syrupy condiments usually spoiled, for Hilary, the general effect.

But there was great confusion over the correct seating, with Madame physically dragging husbands away from wives, and shouting protests when anybody sat down. This had all been arranged; it must be so, and so. And when they were finally seated, there must be a solemn toast to the company.

Vanni, the grizzled little red-eyed blond husband, watched and admired his wife meekly. She stirred him, thrilled him, inspired him now, in her homely, gray, clumsy fifties, as she had done forty years before, when she danced in red boots at a Muscovite street fair. The mere body, for them both, in their relationship, had long ago vanished in some subtler counterpart; some spiritual substitute that made her still a laughing, sturdy, red-cheeked girl of sixteen when he kissed her, that made him as much a part of her life as her children were. Madame Alexandrowska had been a grandmother at forty-two; she had borne sons and daughters, and stood beside their graves, and given to the world brides, and young husbands, labour, service, love. And she had laughed, danced, raged, sung and shouted, dug in the earth, hewed down great trees, cooked and sewed, smiled at the sight of the snuffling babies laid beside her, and torn her hair while she knelt beside the child that would breathe no more.

Hilary, watching her to-night, felt that Etelka Alexandrowska knew what love was, when all that lifeless little bloodless Violet could ever know was vanity and animal desire!

She was at the piano, a song was just over, and it was eleven o'clock, when Kronski came in. The room was well filled now, every divan had its murmuring and argumentative group; tea was being passed, and strange Russian refreshments.

Kronski looked somewhat rumpled, weary, and irritable. Hilary got no nod from him, and watched him curiously for a few minutes with speculative eyes. He was in a bad mood; something had tired him unusually; the prospect of music, she thought, was not bright. And he had not brought his violin, either, although he was quite capable, she knew, of having left it in the motor-car, just to be annoying.

The group before the fire closed round him, she could only see the tumbled black top of his head. He was being magnificent; always a bad sign. He was not hearing what people said, and asking them ceremonially to repeat; he was looking blankly at them, his bored eyes half-shut, his insolent voice a mere drawl.

She went on softly improvising; presently ventured Hunding's theme, always magic in its appeal.

"Oh, let us not murder *that*, at least!" he responded to it harshly, striding across the room, "Jazz—and then the Niebelungen Lied, and then jazz again—that is your American way!"

Hilary, her smiling eyes upon him, the silver-and-black magnificence of her gown sweeping about her, continued to press and weave slowly upon the inspired

keys. He leaned upon the piano, angrily eyeing some sheet of music, and angrily tossing it aside.

"Was it so bad—your dinner?" she asked, mildly.

In answer his hard mood dropped, his face became that of a hurt and bewildered child, his eyes found hers hungrily.

"Oh, my God!" he said, simply, elbows upon the piano, his black head in his hands.

"You shouldn't have come here, Konrad," she reproved him. "But now that you are here, get into a chair somewhere, say that you have a headache, and drink some tea!"

"Oh, no, I like them—they are all sweet and good," he said, repentant and mollified, with a kinder glance at the company. "It is the others I do not like!"

"Well, have your tea, anyway," she advised him. "Meanwhile, Kasha is to sing some revolutionary songs."

"Come and sit next to me," he urged. "And we will both drink tea!"

"We will not," she answered, laughingly, as she rose in all her glory and accompanied him across the big room. "Don't you suppose I want to sleep to-night?"

"But what is all this—all this beautifulness?" he asked. "Because I come?" he demanded, with an odd look.

For answer she leaned toward him with a little confidential widening of the eyes that included him in her delight in it.

"Isn't it too magnificent? Butterfly gave it to me when she had to go into mourning."

"But it is—it is superb," he stammered, as the

beauty of velvet-swathed form, coppery braids, shining blue eyes and white and beautiful hand impressed him suddenly. The lines of Hilary's white throat were unbroken by any jewel, her breast was moving quickly with excitement and pleasure, and from her hidden ears dangled the odd and ornate earrings of enamel and gold fringes.

"Too beautiful for a secretary-stepmother!" she said as they sat down together. Konrad made no answer; he seemed quiet to-night. He drank one glass of tea, another, and became his simplest and most gracious self. Presently a man was sent down to the motor for his violin, and to give his chauffeur the heartening message that he need not wait: Kronski would be late to-night.

Kasha sang her wild songs; the talk rose furiously, the room became warmer and more warm. An old and toothless man, who had sat silently mumbling food and drinking tea beside the fire until now, burst out with passionate tales of revolutions and reprisals, of spies, tortures, prisons, exiles.

And then Hilary and Konrad went to the piano.

"Ah, I wish Dora was here!" the girl thought loyally. "She should play—she might really love this! And how much better warm friendship like this is, with its real help and service, than any of their love!"

"Kronski, my friend," she said, shaken to the deeps of her being when, exhausted and breathless, they stopped, and the last of their music echoed through the room, "do you see that you have made your poor m-mother cry?"

He was looking at her oddly again, as she rose and gathered the beautiful gown about her. The room was

still applauding. "More!" cried Etelka. And the others echoed "More!"

"More presently!" Kronski said, not moving his eyes from Hilary. He bent over her solicitously, holding a silky wrap that Kasha had left upon the piano. "Come, we will have a breath of air!" he said, in a voice she had never heard before.

She glanced at the room, with its talking, murmuring, and shifting groups, looked up into his face questioningly, and obediently stepped with him through a curtained door that gave upon a small cluttered passage leading in turn to an open balcony.

This wide iron porch had been a fire-escape once, but it was floored now, and Etelka had placed upon it a big jar of ferns. It was not large, but Hilary and Konrad could stand there comfortably, breathing in the sweet soft air of the winter night, looking down into the deserted street that was met half a block away by the jumble of Third Avenue, and up between the spaces of the quiet stars.

Even Third Avenue was comparatively quiet now; a few roisterers went by singing, and a policeman clicked the pavement with slow heels. Flashing and rattling, and in a blaze of harsh light, two elevated trains rushed past each other and were lost in the night.

Hilary glanced over her bare shoulder at her companion; his face seemed extraordinarily close to her, and his eyes wore a look that gave her a moment's flutter of some odd, unfamiliar uneasiness. She became uncomfortably conscious of her own youth, the warmth and smoothness of that skin that was so close to his face, conscious that her breath was behaving strangely, and

that her breast was rising and falling in a perfectly uncontrollable and unexpected fashion.

"Don't you—don't you like this sort of a party?" Hilary said, to say something. She felt as if there was a demand for some speech or action on her part, but she could not, in this disquiet of her senses, think what it should be.

"Oh, much!" Konrad answered, and was again silent. The girl looked up at the stars, and told herself that after all she and Kronski had come out here but for a moment, and would be going in again at once. She had a sudden panicky wish to go in, back to the music and voices and company——

"Have you any idea of the time, Konrad? After all, I mustn't be too awfully late," she began in some confusion.

"I think we will not talk about the time now," Konrad said. Hilary's heart began to hammer in fright, she turned him a flash of blue eyes, a nervous laugh.

"This pretty pose of being always the mother, the woman of ice—Galatea!—the busy good sister who watches and guards her bad boy, that is charming," the man added presently, after a palpitating pause, and in a deep, almost stern voice. "But underneath she is like the others, is it not so? There is a woman here, flesh and blood, that cries out for life—that can live, and love, and suffer——"

"Konrad!" she whispered, sharply. For his arm was about her now, and he had turned her with the strong pressure of his fingers on her soft arm so that she was close against his breast, protestant, frightened, terrified

eyes upon his oddly dark and passionate face. "Why, Konrad, dear——" she breathed, trying to push him away, and trying to laugh.

"Kiss me!" he said, in an undertone, his lips close to hers. And in an instant he had kissed her, was kissing her rather, she thought in an agonized confusion of body and soul, for it seemed to last for an eternity. Her heart beating against his own rapidly beating heart, the nearness of his face, the shaken lock of black hair that touched her forehead, here in the secret blackness of the night, all conspired to frighten her.

"Kiss me!" he said again, in the same tone, barely releasing her before she felt the fury of his embrace again.

And this time the fire in her own being, unsuspected, but waiting through all these dutiful, happy, busy years for its hour, sprang into sudden flame; she was in his arms, she was young, beautiful, trembling with love and life, and beloved! All the starved impulses of her life burned in her, she was carried away from all consciousness of time or place; she knew only his arms, the faint fragrance of his skin and hair, and the fire of his lips.

"Konrad!" she said presently; they were in the hallway now, and although his hands still imprisoned both hers, they were not so close, and bending like wheat in a breeze, she could gather her routed thoughts for a second and hold him somewhat apart. "Konrad!" she gasped, fighting for mere breath now, "what are we doing—we must be mad——"

"No, we are not mad!" he answered, in his low, trembling tone, entirely unconscious of what he said, and overwhelming her again. "My beautiful—my lovely girl—my dearest!" he murmured over and over.

Hilary was really frightened now, of what she did not quite know, but—but—her struggling senses warned her, there was danger here!

She was free, and he was standing still, watching her. Half-dazed, and only anxious to escape, she stumbled down the little passage and went blindly back through the door into the big studio again.

It was fortunate for Hilary that the company was not critical and the lights dim. For a few minutes it was impossible for her to gather her thoughts together, or to control her breathing, and the trembling of her muscles that shook her from head to foot. Her mouth was dry, her face aflame, her hair was at least somewhat disordered, and her lips burned as if their secret were written on them for all the world to read.

Not knowing what she did, she sat down next to Kasha; someone was singing—thank heaven she could seem to be listening and need not speak! Slowly the storm subsided, she breathed more evenly; she could covertly put a hand to her hair, and push a hairpin into place; she could take her handkerchief and touch with it the lips that still were trembling.

"And your car is here, Miss Collier," Kasha said, regretfully, during the applause. "It came while you and Kronski were playing, but my grandmother wouldn't let me tell you!"

"Oh, my dear——!" Hilary exclaimed, aghast at the hour. When she and Kronski were playing! It seemed eons ago. She arose, only afraid of betraying to them all that was seething and throbbing in her heart, her eyes, her voice. As the beautiful figure, in

its silver and black, slowly crossed the floor, Kronski came quietly in, and fell into talk with Von Mandescheid, who was at the piano. Hilary heard his voice, behind her, her heart began to thump again——

She was in Etelka's bedroom, in her furs; old Vanni himself pattered down the long stairway with her, and put her into the car. She fancied, as she left the apartment, that somebody opened the studio door and looked out; several persons, perhaps, she did not turn. It was with a great sense of safety that she gained the warm limousine, waved good-night to her bareheaded bowing old host, upon the pavement, and knew herself to be at last alone.

Now she could think! she told herself breathlessly. But it was a long time before her thoughts would shape themselves into anything like order. They wheeled about her like wild birds; she laughed erratically, settled herself back against the cushions with shut eyes, opened them suddenly and leaned against the glass to watch the moving streets, thrust her hands deep into the pockets of her coat, changed her position, and repeated the whole process from beginning to end.

She exchanged a sociable good-night with the chauffeur, fled upstairs in the warm darkness, flashed into her room and shut the door behind her with both hands, whirling about to face the empty room, and laughing excitedly, as if a thousand eyes were upon her. In the mirror she exchanged another excited laugh with her brilliant counterpart. Going to bed was a dream-like, timeless process, now carried on with feverish swiftness, now arrested entirely, while Hilary sat transfixed, smiling into space, her eyes like sapphire stars.

Once in bed, she decided to think. But almost immediately, smiling, she was asleep and, as happy people do, she slept all night like an infant, hardly stirring until the late winter sunshine, and Alice with fire-wood, were both noiselessly entering the room.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT was pleasant—what was pleasant—thought the awakening Hilary, turning and smiling sleepily. Oh, yes—oh, yes, she remembered it all, and with the flood of recollection, a flood of brilliant colour suffused her.

She got up in that dreamy, mystic state known only to the woman in love. Her bath, her powders and perfumes, were all a sort of happy rite this morning, because a man had found her lovely. She looked at Alice, hanging the black-and-silver gown away in its sheet, and she could have kissed the robe that had shared with her this wonderful hour.

The future concerned Hilary not at all; she knew that she would hear from Konrad this morning. Her whole existence was centred upon the moment when flowers, a note, or even the man himself should arrive.

She had been out so late that the kindly Alice brought her breakfast upstairs at ten o'clock; Hilary looked sharply at the tray. Letters—but not *the* letter.

A film of doubt came over her radiant mood; she stopped eating, and it seemed for a few chilled seconds as if her heart stopped, too.

Could he—but it was not possible that he could have been disgusted—have been shocked at her last night?

Swift upon this thought came another even more disquieting; he had meant nothing by his kiss, men never

did—he had kissed other women, scores of women; men were doing it everywhere, every night of the world, and nothing further came of it!

Hilary pushed her breakfast aside; food choked her. She got to her feet, trailed slowly to the window in her thin silk wrapper, and stood looking vacantly down at the frosty, sunshiny street, her mind awhirl.

"Nothing—why should he? Kissing one woman—he probably kisses scores! So that's *that*. Except that I am silly enough to have taken it seriously—fool, fool, fool! He would laugh at me, glorying—glorying in that! It was the music, or the dress——

"No, it wasn't. It was Konrad. Konrad! Well, I have got it at last, Butterfly. There's no mistaking *this*. Oh, it can't be—it can't be that after all my talk about being his sister and his mother—I *can't* have fallen in love with him!"

She was silent, looking out, hugging the thin silk wrapper tightly about her.

"That's it. I love him!" she said, clearly and softly, aloud.

Then for a long time she was silent, while shame and fear had their way with her.

"I forced myself upon him. He didn't want me to come and take care of his papers. I insisted. I laughed at his objections—oh, where were my decency and common sense and dignity! I forced myself in, and I laughed about it, boasted about it to everyone—oh, my God, what shall I do! I can't live and have him know—have everybody know—that I was falling in love with him! They knew it—Violet knew it when she asked me not to tell them about Santa Claus!

"I'm just like all the rest; falling in love with him—I'm just like Butterfly—poor Butterfly!"

She went to her dressing table, loosened her hair.

"But I can't stand this!" Hilary said, frightened at the pain that was torturing her. "Can this be falling in love? I can't bear it—if it is——"

"He didn't make love to me last night," she remembered, with a wave of actual sickness. "All he said was that in spite of my motherly pose I was just like the others——"

And as the full misery of remembering just what he had said, and of her own surrender to his masterful kisses, she felt that she only wanted to die.

With every second some fresh stinging memory appalled her. Now it was Butterfly hinting delicately: "We are not relations of his, after all, Sis!" Now it was a recollection of Violet's sneering smile. Hilary, in a fever of humiliation and shame, walked the floor, hating her stupid brain, hating her blind soul, and above all hating the treacherous body that had seemed to her so beautiful last night!

If she went out, she might miss him. He might be coming—but he usually slept until almost noon. She looked at the telephone; it required an actual physical effort to keep her hand from touching it, her voice from asking for his number. He was only a few squares away, in one moment she might hear the rich, pleasant voice: "Well, what do you wish—who is it?"

The mere thought of it bathed her in waves of colour. Only yesterday she had entered his studio as casually as any messenger boy, had rebuked him for his laziness—he had been eating his breakfast by the fire at high

noon—had reviewed with him the music he was to play at the afternoon symphony concert. He was usually somewhat nervous and agitated before a public performance, but this was to be only a familiar concerto; and Konrad and Von Mandescheid had been busy with Dancla's Theme from Rossini, while Hilary went over his mail, and wrote out some checks, in her pretty, businesslike hand, for him to sign.

That was yesterday. To-day she could not see him, she could not think of him without an agitation that was as mysterious as it was unwelcome. What to do—where to go—how to go on placidly living, meeting Mrs. Spaulding and other casual associates—but the thought suffocated her!

There was just one person in the world, and life stopped short until this nervous, restless, all-pervading hunger for his society was satisfied.

Dora drifted into her room about eleven o'clock, her shining hair, which had just been treated, hanging in a bright mane about her shoulders.

"Have a nice time last night, Hilary?" she yawned.

"Yes. It was really very nice!" Hilary looked at her own reflection as she put on her small feathered hat, and saw upon her face a carelessly bright smile.

"Konrad come in?"

"Quite late."

"Music?"

"Oh, yes. Kasha sang, and some woman, and young Martin, and Konrad—Konrad and I played a lot of the Sarasate Spanish Dances. Horribly difficult, but the most delightful things! I wished for you, Butterfly!"

"I knew that if Craig and I went, we'd come home

early," Butterfly said. "You never know, at that sort of a party, whether they'll all get fighting about single tax, and waste the whole evening, or whether something really worth while will happen. Konrad sounded *dead* this morning——"

"Konrad?" Hilary exclaimed, suddenly cold.

"He telephoned."

"Oh. To you?"

"To say good-bye, he said. He asked for you, and I said I thought you were asleep, and he said not to disturb you. He'll be back Wednesday night. He's going to have a man's dinner for Serge Levin on Friday."

"Good-bye——!" He had gone, to the Dwyers first, and from them, on Sunday afternoon, to Canada. She would not see him, nor hear his voice, until Thursday! This biting, gnawing unrest must somehow be borne until then.

It was eleven o'clock, past eleven. And Violet Dwyer was to call for him at eleven this morning. He was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI

Hilary presently walked out into the sharp, shining air. She went up to the new apartment, met Craig's mother there, lunched later with her, and with Craig, at the Plaza, chatted with a fine earnest woman there regarding the music for a Charity Bazaar, walked downtown and stopped at one or two shops, read signs, avoided traffic, looked into beautiful windows, and finally came home weary at five o'clock, to find a charming little Madame Le Noir calling—a bride, who had met Miss Collier at a tea, and who was hungry for the sound of her own language. Hilary and she talked of Paris for an hour, and the young Denise told her husband later that Miss Collier's great charm was that she was so sympathetic, so absorbed in what one had to say.

But as a matter of fact, during this entire day, Hilary was actually conscious of nothing. She drank air, she ate straw and dust, shadowy shapes moved about her, and far-away voices spoke to her. She was wrapped in her own thoughts, able to appreciate at last what Dora had been experiencing all that long summer. It was in just such a haze as this that poor Butterfly had moved, dreamy, absent-minded, sweetly kind and interested in other people's affairs, simply because that was the quickest way of disposing of them.

On Sunday she and Mrs. Spaulding made a pilgrimage

to Hudson, the older woman touched by Hilary's willingness to go. Rodney Spaulding's widowed sister, a dreary woman with dank black hair and odorous weeds, lived in Hudson, and for every one of the many years since he had left home as a boy he had gone there to spend his birthday and hers, together. Only the last few years had broken the chain, and now, with his anniversary so close, his own widow had decided that to renew this custom would be consoling to her and to her sister-in-law as well.

So Hilary made with her the cold long run, dined between the two quiet, elderly women, walked out into Hudson's bright snows under bare trees the next day, looked at old pictures, played old music, visited old graves, and charmed the old servants. She went to a ladies' card-party on Tuesday with Mrs. Spaulding and Mrs. Richie, and won a rock-crystal bowl as first prize.

And all the time her heart said "Konrad—Konrad—Konrad," like a clapper going back and forth in a bell, and she felt that her smile had grown cryptic and concealing, like Dora's own.

They came back to town on Wednesday afternoon; there was mail, but there was no letter. Her heart sank. He had telephoned on Saturday morning, to be sure, but not to her. And since then there had been no word. Craig told her that she was growing pretty; she laughed deprecatingly and indifferently. Dora was full of small gossip; Hilary had to ask her to repeat again and again.

He would get in late on Wednesday night; at any time after that the telephone might ring——

Suppose it did not ring? What would—what could

she do? Could she not telephone to ask how old Von Mandescheid had enjoyed the winter trip? Surely——

But her face burned. She was manœuvring like any common little maid-servant. She must simply wait, as women had been waiting since time began.

On Wednesday, at about ten o'clock upon a gray, snowy morning, Alice came in with the mail. Hilary, who was dressing to go out with Mrs. Spaulding, took it with a sudden spasm of actual pain at her heart. Under the other letters was a big, limp, foreign envelope; she could see the violet ink.

She stood it on her dressing table, her heart thumping in regular hammer strokes that almost suffocated her. It was postmarked "Montreal"; he had written her on Monday, then, she calculated, looking at it comfortably and leisurely, as it stood before her.

Her other mail was not important; Hilary opened it first. The Bates child was marrying Harry Dunlap; it was amusing to see "Doctor and Mrs. Foster Miller" announcing the marriage of "their daughter." Little Eleanor Bates had never seen her mother's third husband until some two years ago. And here was her receipt for her dues in the Wayside Shelter Association; and an invitation to Mrs. Polk's, "to meet Mrs. Gerard Le Noir." Well, she had met little Denise Le Noir, but she would go.

She took up Konrad's letter; held it in her hand. There was a conscious delight in the slow opening of the flap. He had written her in French.

Hilary read the letter once; read it a second time. Her face crimsoned and grew pale. Slowly, with her breast heaving, and her eyes narrowed upon space, she

crushed it in her left hand, and it dropped to the floor.

She stood up, went to the window, and stood there, in a blaze of shame and pain that shook her from head to foot. All life had stopped, the sky was darkened, there was nothing left. She began to walk to and fro; impossible to stand still.

"Oh—oh—oh!" she said, convulsedly, beating with her closed fists upon the heavy dressing-room door. She dropped on her knees beside her bed, pressed her still locked fists against her forehead, her whole body quivering with the storm of misery that possessed her.

After awhile, still breathing fast and hard, she got up, and went to get the letter, and made herself smooth it out, with hands that longed to tear it and herself to pieces, and read it again. Konrad had written:

My dear:

I did not understand, and for that reason you must forgive me. I knew that some day the wonderful gift of that great heart of yours would be given to some man; how could I know that in your exquisite generosity it had already been given? I am sorry. My first thought was of Butterfly; not as you love, my dear, but she can love, too, and she can suffer. And will you believe that I am suffering and that I hope, when the memory of Friday night is not so new, that you will come to be your poor boy's secretary and stepmother again, and forgive him a moment of madness?

What does the song say? "Take a cup and drink it up." Yours is a hard cup to drink, but I know how brave, how good, how wise you are.

Konrad.

That was all. Hilary read it a third, a fourth time, and then suddenly tore it to small pieces, to tinier pieces, to scraps, and sat smiling darkly at the little heap of white-and-violet spotted bits for a long, long

while. After awhile she shrugged, laughed suddenly aloud, and then, sighing with sheer exhaustion, rested her elbows upon the table, and put her weary head into her hands. She felt weak, incapable of emotion, and as if she had just passed through a devastating illness.

She could think no longer; she could suffer no longer; she was spent.

He loved Dora. Sickened with its tireless round of monotonous thoughts, yet her mind began again. He loved Dora. And she, stupidly, insistently, shamelessly, had forced him to admit it. He was European, the fact that Dora was Craig's wife would not deter him. He might regret it, liking Craig, but that was all. And he had gently, kindly, generously put Hilary out of his life; he could like her, he could use her, but love—love was for Butterfly!

"Oh, why, why, why?" she brooded darkly. Must all men love Dora? Was her fair, babyish, confiding beauty absolutely irresistible to men? Dora—little helpless Butterfly, who could not help him, who did not understand him, who was utterly incapable of entering into his life and his work—it was a few years of Dora's softness and sweetness and plaintiveness that he desired! And to gain that, Craig's life, his mother's life, her own, Hilary's, life, must be sacrificed!

But worst of all, his own would be as inevitably wrecked as theirs. Hilary writhed at the thought. He was so much a boy, he so much needed understanding and kindness when his moments of rage and anger and despair came on. The right treatment then, the hot tea and the soothing words, and he was the most lovable, the most abject of penitents.

But what would Dora give him? Why, only the impatient contempt that she gave Craig—Craig, the equable and sweet, the just and balanced husband whom she was already willing to cast aside. Dora's interest in Konrad's profession would always be secondary to absorption in her own position as the artist's wife. "That's his wife in the box," men would tell each other, on concert nights, and Dora, hearing them, would straighten her little bare shoulders and toss back her furs.

That every concert was an ordeal for Konrad, that he returned from them exhausted and nervous and excitable, that he needed a great deal of simple, almost childish, domestic routine to balance the strain of his life, never had occurred, and never would occur, to Butterfly. She would demand of him exactly what she would demand of Craig, who was always amiable, and had never had a mood in his life.

Hilary, thinking of it, suffered for them all. She felt Craig's position keenly; she felt for her good friend, his mother. She was heartsick at the thought of Butterfly serenely wrecking her own life; Butterfly would have a year or two of excitement and delight, it was true, but then what? Then there was Hilary's life; she could not go back to Mount Holly, she could not breathe in the city, she could not face a future empty of the big, impetuous, tractable boy who had so suddenly become all her world. She had no world without him; he was the beginning and end of everything.

And the serious consideration was Konrad's self. If Dora proved mad enough to ask for her divorce, if all the hideousness of the open scandal were faced, and

if Konrad loved her, then his life was wrecked, too. They were too much alike, they were both children. Dora's childhood had been surrounded by hardships, it was true, but Dora had never faced them. And Konrad had known want and struggle and cold and hunger, many, many times. But his art was for ever young, and in creating and re-creating immortal melody he eternally renewed his own impetuous youth.

Following a weary line of thought, she had forgotten the letter. Now she carried the softened little handful of particles to which she had reduced it to the fire, and burned them. She had been engaged to lunch with some women at the Colony Club; she telephoned to her hostess presently, pleading a heavy cold and headache. Then she went walking, in a world of pain.

Konrad's pictures; his dark head with the wave of black-tossed hair, his wide, serious mouth and dark eyes, his violin's thin neck in his big fingers, were on fences everywhere. There was to be a special Thanksgiving Day concert. He was to play the big concerto, and the French group, and the "*Zigeunerweisen*," she remembered, with a homesick longing for just one more of their happy mornings in the studio, quarrelling over his programmes.

CHAPTER XXVII

Hilary was at home again, taking off wet shoes, chilled and tired, and surprised to see that the endless winter day was working toward dark at last, when Dora came into her room.

"Why weren't you at Elise's luncheon?" asked Dora, who was in street dress, and who flung aside her furs to sit down beside the fire, stretch, yawn, and light a cigarette.

"I felt perfectly horrid."

"Better?"

"Oh, all right, thank you, Butterfly. I walked, and I got some books downtown, and I went in to see the La Farge windows, since I was down that way. And I had my hair washed."

Dora was silent, watching the fire, and smoking quietly. Hilary came in turn to stretch her feet to the blaze, her too-high colour somewhat faded, and her eyes showing fatigue. She had put on her thin silk kimono; her coil of hair was loosened on her shoulders.

"Any one coming in, Butterfly?"

Dora roused herself from deep study.

"I—no, not that I know of!"

"Could we have tea here?"

"Love it!"

When Alice had departed with directions, the two still sat silently watching the fire. Dora sighed once

or twice, and Hilary's thoughts said over and over: ". . . how could I know that your heart had been given? I am sorry . . . my first thought was of Butterfly . . . yours is a hard cup to drink. . . ."

"I don't know why I should feel so utterly exhausted!" Dora remarked, as Alice deftly settled cups and spoons.

"Nor I. I feel simply dead."

Again they were silent. Dora drank her tea; Hilary hers. They refilled their cups, neither touching the toast.

"Sis!" Dora said then, in an odd voice. "I was thinking to-day what an angel you've always been to me!"

The chord she touched was sensitive to-night; Hilary was alarmed to feel tears pressing behind her eyelids.

"I don't think I realized it at the time, I know I didn't," Dora went on, and stopped short. Suddenly she laid her hand upon Hilary's, with a look so sweet, so honest and young, in the brown eyes, that Hilary felt in her heart a sudden rush of her old passionate devotion. Their little rice-puddings, their walks for pussy-willows and autumn leaves; the Christmas presents that cost so many sacrifices, and that seemed so small and shabby now; the cold morning, when they took turns in getting out of bed first to light fires; their very familiarity with each other's clothes; the terms, "your blue hat" and "my best gloves," all rose up like tender ghosts to rebuke her for this strange hour when any one's love could seem to her so important as Butterfly's.

Oh, to go back to those old, pure simple days, when a

ride in a motor-car was a great luxury, and when they used to talk of "rich people," of "society people," as beings of another sphere; when they were all in all to each other, she and Butterfly.

"I'm going to talk to you honestly, Sis," Dora began again. "I have to. I don't know where I'm going, or what's going to happen. You've—you've got to help me!"

"You know I will, Butterfly," Hilary answered, with a steady glance.

"This is the first thing," Dora began, after a silence. "I—it's all over between me and Craig, Hilary. I'm sorry, God knows how sorry I am! But it's *over*."

Hilary did not alter her grave, intent look. Once this statement would have filled her with consternation. Now she was only apprehensive, only anxious about what might follow it.

"Why, Dora?"

"Well, why?" Dora repeated, her troubled brown eyes on the fire, her white forehead slightly wrinkled. "It's hard to make any third person see it, Sis. But in the first place, all the thrill, all the—I don't know—all the *sympathy*," she pursued, finding her words slowly, "has simply died out between us. We don't speak the same language any more. You know how much I've always talked, all my life. I can't talk with Craig now at all. I'm just silent when we're alone together. I can't be natural. There's just some sense of—I don't know, *antagonism*, all the time. I feel that he doesn't approve of me——"

"He never scolds, Butterfly," Hilary said, as her sister paused.

"No, no, I know he doesn't. I know he doesn't!" Dora answered, eagerly. "But it's just that I feel it—I feel that he is changed, that he's watching me, wishing that I was different! And I won't have my life that way," Dora went on, with sudden vigour, "I won't have Craig less to me than he was—when we first met each other!" Tears sprang to her eyes; she brushed them away. "Sis, a thousand divorces are better than that," she began again, suddenly. "To me it's infinitely more decent to face the unpleasantness rather than go on living with a man you have ceased to love! As friends, we would always love and respect each other. This way—but no," Dora finished, "this way's not possible! It's all wrong."

"What does Craig feel about it?" Hilary asked, after a heartsick silence.

"Men are infinitely more conventional than women," Dora answered, readily. "They hate publicity, they hate change. But if Craig is honest, he'll have to admit that, after it's once over, this is the only way. Hilary, what would you do? Could you go on living with a man you had simply ceased to love? And can you help it if you do stop loving? We can't control love. Love is the sacred, the one wonderful thing——" Dora added, dreamily, and stopped short.

"But there's more than that," she began again, as Hilary seemed to find nothing to say. "There's more than that. Sis, there's somebody else. I used to feel, years ago, that some day I would know what a great passion was. After I was married, and knew that—with all my affection for him, and respect for him, and *devotion* to Craig—knew that it—wasn't Craig, I used

to pray that it would never come to me. Well. It's come."

Ice was gathering about Hilary's heart, and she felt that all her life, the years when she was forming her own character, and helping to form Dora's, were an empty waste.

"And you know who it is," said Dora, with a sudden serious look.

"Konrad," Hilary answered, slowly.

"Konrad!" Dora echoed, on a soft even breath. And she threw back her head, locked her white hands high above it, and laughed in sudden exultation. "There has never been anybody else in my life!" she breathed, her far-away eyes on the ceiling, her lips half-parted in a smile. "Since last spring, the very day you sailed—I've known it. It is the great love—the only love of my life! I can't help it, Hilary. It's just—come. It's *here*. I can't see him, I can't be near him, without knowing, just by the way my heart beats, that there never will be any one else in my life. You may scold me, Craig may say what he pleases, I can't help it! I belong to Konrad—it's destined so!"

"You mean you are going to divorce Craig?" Hilary asked, after a silence.

"I mean I shall have to, Sis. It's the only honest way!"

"Have you thought *how?*"

"I've thought this far. First I shall have a talk with Konrad, plan it all clearly. I hate to do that, Sis, but I must. I mean it seems a horrible thing to do, as Craig's wife, but then I'm *not* Craig's wife, inasmuch as our marriage is only a farce. I shall have a talk with

Konrad, and then you and I will go to California, as Violet did. We can live quietly there, practise, and so on; I should think we'd love it! And then, next year, say a year from January, we can quietly go abroad. We will see Konrad, here, if he's here, or in Norway, if he's there. And then we can plan. You see I'll only be twenty-three when it's all settled. The start is hard, of course. But half the women you meet have been divorced and remarried, and who cares? They don't even tell you about it any more."

"Butterfly, you know how I love you," Hilary said, trembling, when Dora was still. "But, dearest, think—*think* before you do this to Craig. He has always been so generous to you, dear——"

"But if I don't *love* him, Hilary?" Butterfly asked, plaintively, widening her eyes.

"Dearest, couldn't you try again?"

Dora's lips set themselves stubbornly, and her eyes narrowed.

"I have tried again—a hundred times!" she said. "It's no use. It's just *dead*. What can I do?"

"But, Dora, your duty is toward your husband!"

Dora flushed.

"And none toward myself? None toward Konrad? He is one of the great people of the world, Sis. Conventions mean nothing to him——"

"On the contrary," Hilary interrupted, "I think Konrad is extremely conventional! I tell him he's a regular old German haus-frau!"

"Yes, my dear, because that's the way you treat all men," Dora responded. "You act exactly as if you were Konrad's big sister. You have about as much

passion in you as my slipper! You—why, Craig's more than halfway in love with you, everyone knows it, Vi thinks it's a perfect joke, and you act as if you never saw him! And if you and Craig——"

"Butterfly, don't talk that way!" Hilary interrupted, sharply. "Let Vi, and Cissie, and all the rest of them do it if they like! But please have the decency to treat marriage in your conversation as your mother did, and as all respectable women do, as if it involved some obligation, and had some—some dignity! I don't think any one thing about your particular group maddens me so much," Hilary continued, warming, "as their breezy way of talking about each other's husbands and wives! 'Billy's in love with Rose, and Rutty is crazy about Bobby Wendell, and please don't kiss my husband, and So-and-so's mad about your wife,'" she quoted hotly. "It makes me furious! It's disgusting. I know they all do it, I know they don't always mean it, but I think it's disgusting, and I hate to hear my sister joining in!"

"Well!" Butterfly exclaimed, in airy resentment, as she paused. And for awhile there was a troubled silence between them.

"I must live my own life," Dora said, soberly, after awhile. "Every human being has the right to do that!"

"You are hardly more than a child," Hilary answered, sternly. "You don't know what your life is going to be, yet. You don't know that by the time you were ready to marry him, Konrad might not be involved with some other woman!"

"No, I don't," Dora answered, with unexpected

serenity. "But I know this: I cannot keep up this pretense with Craig any longer. I must be free. That's all I propose to do now. What will follow I can't tell, of course."

"Konrad has told you that he loves you?" Hilary made herself ask, feeling old and inexperienced beside this poised child who was yet a wife of three years' standing, and who was so strangely sure of herself.

"That's what I wanted to tell you about," Dora said, her manner suddenly becoming less assured and more appealing. "I knew he did last spring. I know he does now. But—but he's a great lion now, Sis. I almost never see him alone, and when I do—he's changed. Oh, not toward me," she hastened to interrupt herself, "I am still his 'golden Butterfly,' he still hunts me out—everywhere—you must see it? He has a different expression in his face when he speaks to me; and at his concerts he always looks toward me! But —lately—and this is where you come in, Sis. Lately he—I don't know. You see, you're always there. He likes you as you do him, he turns to you for everything, and—I know what you said the other day, that somebody had to look after him—but, Hilary, you don't know how different it is! You never treat him—you'll never treat any man, I think—except just as a boy. I can't—I can't imagine a man kissing you, Sis, or your wanting him to! Craig said, when you had on the black gown the other night: 'What a wife she'll make someone some day! Some man,' he said, 'who's as lucky as I am, in being her friend, before he is her lover!' You've no idea how he admires you, Sis," went on Butterfly, timidly. "And you've no idea how often I've wished

that it had been you instead of me. Hilary, you would make him—I don't mean now!—but I mean some day, years from now, when Kronski and his giddy little, silly, adoring wife are all quite simply taken for granted and people forget that I've ever been married before—you'd make Craig so utterly, wonderfully, completely happy——"

"Butterfly, *please*——!"

"Sis, that's what I've been trying to get my courage up to ask you!" Butterfly burst out, growing agitated, and slipping from her low chair suddenly, to kneel in a flutter of laces on the hearth rug, and put her arms about Hilary. "Dearest, I want you to know what this means to me—that it's my *life*. I dream of it, I think of it all day and all night; myself as Konrad's wife. And you can help me—nobody else can! Think of the places we would travel, Hilary, the great persons we would meet, and the wonderful music we'd make together! Why shouldn't I take my place as Sabine Charpentier's daughter—he says I *shall!* In one of the wonderful talks we had last spring—of course there was no thought of my getting a divorce then! But just talking of the future, and of what I could do, he told me it was folly for me not to try at least for concert work, not to use the gift I have. Imagine it, Hilary! Paris for a few months every spring, to get frocks and hear the new music, summers in Norway or Holland, and New York in winter. Wouldn't it be ideal? Wouldn't it make of my life just what we've always dreamed? And you'd be proud of me, Sis. You don't know how hard I'd work, how I'd practise! We'd have an apartment here, either the one he has now, or a larger one;

we'd refuse ourselves to everyone—except now and then a really big affair, or something we couldn't refuse —and we'd become known as the professional husband and wife who lived a dignified, ideal life, instead of rushing about with the fastest set in the city——"

Hilary was holding the slender, fragrant young creature close, with both hands laid lightly upon Dora's shoulders. Butterfly had never seemed more charmingly confiding, more sweet and loving than now.

But suddenly Hilary saw under the earnest, business-like air the real Dora. She saw the selfishness, the blindness, the cruelty that were all so largely a question of mere youth and ignorance now, but for which many such young creatures had paid at a bitter cost! So logical, so rational, so seemingly generous, was this enthusiastic plan; the world was full of pretty, passionate women with plans just like it!

"A person like Violet," Dora said, suddenly, with a little vicious emphasis on the name, "I would never have in my house!"

Hilary's grave, piercing half-smile deepened.

"What has Violet done that you would not have done?" she asked.

"Violet!" Dora echoed, unpleasantly shocked. "Why, but she—but she—— But you *know* how you despise Violet, Sis!" she interrupted herself to say, reproachfully.

"For divorcing a man who drank, and was notoriously unfaithful, even if she couldn't prove it!" Hilary reminded her sister. "And for saying that she still likes Reggy, that they're good friends."

"Oh, Hilary—Hilary!" Dora said, softly, her colour

a little deepened but her eyes half-amused and half-despairing, "It's no use, with you! You don't understand—you never will understand—what love is!"

"Now suppose, Butterfly," Hilary said presently with her own colour suddenly flaming, "suppose I told you that I did know what love is, in every fibre of my soul and body? Suppose I told you that I cared for a man so much that there was nothing else in my life except agony—agony—agony——"

She put the soft hands and the slender body aside, got to her feet, her eyes misting and her voice thick. But after a restless turn about the room she came back to her chair, and Dora watching her aghast, leaned on her knees again.

"But, Hilary—Hilary!" she whispered. "I can't believe it! And is it Craig?"

"Oh, Craig!" Hilary echoed, impatiently, and with pain in her voice. "No. No, it's not Craig," she said, gently. "It's Konrad."

And as she said the name a great wave of ecstasy and weakness and strange pride enveloped her, and she hardly cared what Dora thought, or even that Dora heard.

"*Konrad!*" Dora breathed, drawing back. Hilary looked at her bravely and simply. Dora's face had grown a little pale, the pupils of her eyes dilated, her lids narrowed, and about her mouth came the faintly hostile, faintly scornful lines that Hilary already knew. "Konrad!" she repeated, incredulously, her breath coming fast. "Why, but, Hilary—but, Hilary," she groped. "You told me—you told me—you laughed at the idea that there could be anything between you two!"

"I was wrong!" Hilary said, simply. "I—I know better now."

"Hilary, you don't—you're not in love!" Dora said, eagerly, after a stupefied silence in which her brown eyes had never moved from Hilary's face. "You—but I can't imagine it! I can't somehow—and he doesn't—I *know* he isn't in love with you!" stammered Dora, uneasily, with long pauses.

"No," Hilary admitted, "I don't think he is!"

"Then you just—then you just—but honestly, it won't last, Sis," Dora assured her, relieved, but still anxious. "I know what you mean, I've felt that sort of thing hundreds of times! I mean, just a sort of *case*—that's all that is. You couldn't be so calm if it was the real thing!"

"I'm not calm," Hilary confessed, quietly. "No, I don't want to deceive you, Butterfly. I love him. I'd die to give him happiness, to feel sure that his career would go on from one success to another! I'd live with him in a three-room cabin in Poland if he wanted me to—I'd wash for him, and cook for him, and bear him children—I'd never want to see anybody or any place, else! If his art failed him, I think I'd be glad. I think I'd like to prove to him how little it mattered! And if for some reason he wasn't legally free to marry me, I don't think that would make much difference, either——"

She buried her hot cheeks in her hands; Butterfly, distressed, locked her arms affectionately about her, and kissed the bowed braids.

"So that's *that!*" Hilary said, presently, sitting up, and with a long breath.

"But, Sis, I don't see how his work could fail him," Dora protested, puzzled. "He makes a perfect fortune, every year, and he's tied up for five years on that contract. It seems to me——"

"That was a mere figure of speech, Butterfly!" Hilary assured her, smiling in her sorrowful fashion into the brown eyes so near.

"As for children," Butterfly continued, a little nettled, "it seems to me that if there's one thing a professional man and woman *don't* want it's children! If a man doesn't love his wife, he certainly isn't going to love her any more because there's a lot of babies, with measles and croup and all that, in the house!"

"It's a great interest, a great joy in common, Butterfly," Hilary submitted, mildly. Dora was not listening.

"I'm glad you told me this, Sis," she presently said, affectionately. "I never suspected it. I knew of course that Konrad and you were getting to be very friendly—but there's a difference, you know. I don't *know* that he loves me," Dora added, "but I do know that if it was any other woman, even you, dearest, I *couldn't* stand it. I should kill myself! I'm—I'm my mother's daughter," she confessed, with a half-smile, "I'm not like other people. This—this is the one *real* thing that has come into my life. Sis, you'll help me manage it, won't you? You love us both. You'll always come first, always, with us both. You've been my mother, my guardian, my teacher, and inspiration all my life—help me now! You can see what it means to me——"

"Butterfly," Hilary began, slowly, in a long silence,

when the sudden tears upon Dora's lashes were dry, and they had kissed each other. "If he loved me, I don't think anything in this world would keep me from him. But I don't think he does. I think he loves you, dear."

"Did he say so?" Dora's exquisite rainbow face hurt Hilary strangely.

"Almost that," she admitted, watching closely.

"*Sis!*" Dora cried, with a laugh and a sob.

"But, Butterfly, if you believe me, if you trust me," Hilary said, trembling, "you won't do this—now. Go with Craig to Mount Holly; you were happy there, as a little girl, you are the great lady of the town now, you can have anything you please! Try again, my darling! Give it a year's trial. No marriage could survive the atmosphere you're in now. But Craig deserves——"

"Craig is no more anxious for this ridiculous farce to go on than I am!" Butterfly said, scornfully and impatiently.

"Dearest, you are young. You'll be glad all your life if you take time, and prayer, and thought to this now."

"But what for?" fretted Butterfly. "I don't see what *for*. Would *you* wait, if Konrad loved *you?*"

"No, but then I am free, Dora."

"Exactly! And I mean to be free."

"And I have never loved any other man, dear."

"No, and neither have I! I was a child—I had no more idea what love was than my slipper! Ah, Sis," pleaded Butterfly, embracing her, her lovely face close to Hilary's own, and her lips close to Hilary's ear, "help me with this as you always do! Tell Craig and

his mother, and any one else who criticizes me, just how it was—that I couldn't do anything else! It's my chance; it means my whole life! Come to California with me, or Nevada, or wherever I go—Hilary, if you do, I will never ask you anything again in my whole life! *Please!* And let me be Konrad's secretary for a few days, just so that I may have a talk with him before I go to Craig! I can't force such things, I can't plunge into a vital conversation like that anywhere—and at the first second! Nobody could. Help to give me an opportunity. Sis, if it was some man who loved you, I would help you—truly, truly I would!"

"Then why not help me now?" Hilary asked, her blue eyes dark with bewilderment and pain.

"I would, if he loved you," Dora answered, promptly.

"Suppose I could make him love me, Butterfly? Suppose I told Craig to take you away, and suppose I tried to win Konrad? I *might*."

Dora's expression was shocked and incredulous. This was Hilary's voice, quiet, thoughtful, tender, as she had heard it all her life. But these could not be Hilary's words! Hilary—who had never failed her—who adored her and believed in her and gave her every good thing in life——

"You wouldn't!" she said, proudly.

"I might—for Konrad, Butterfly. If—if I truly believed that I would make him the better wife!"

Dora's cheeks grew crimson.

"You couldn't do that, Sis! If it meant the happiness of my whole life!"

They were both on their feet now, looking at each

other across the length of the mantel. Darkness had long ago filled the street outside; here in the warm, luxurious room the firelight shone brightly, and the rose-coloured great lamp that Hilary had touched sent a pool of soft brilliance upon their empty chairs.

Dora came close to her sister, her brown eyes darker than ever with fear and supplication and passion.

"You promised Mother—you promised Father—that if it was for my work——" she said, breathing hard.

Hilary, who had rested one elbow upon the mantel that was not quite as high as her shoulder, looked down at Dora, small, pale, and agitated, over her other shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Butterfly!" she said. "But—this time it means my life and my happiness, too!"

She turned back to the mantel, and rested her folded arms upon it, and dropped her head upon her arms. She heard a sharp sound from Dora, not a sigh, not quite an exclamation. When she turned back to the room again, a long, long time later, Dora had noiselessly vanished.

That they should meet quite naturally at dinner, and talk together, and later play the usual several rubbers of bridge, seemed the unbelievable, impossible thing. Yet, like many another unbelievable, impossible thing it happened; there were guests, seven in all, for dinner, and Hilary, Craig said, had never seemed so amusing and so brilliant.

As for Dora, in creamy-white satin, without jewels or ornaments, she was exquisite. Her colour was high, her laughter incessant, and the radiant aura of health and young beauty that hung about her, the fragrance

and colour and glow, captivated them all, even including Hilary.

Craig was always extremely susceptible to the charm of his wife's beauty; she had young Bert Hungerford as her partner to-night, but whenever he was dummy Craig wandered to her table, and stood looking down at her bright head, her white gown and shining little white slippers, and the soft little hand that held the cards.

Hilary did not play bridge, but Dora had learned to play extremely well. Hilary was paired with the older Jesse Duer, a man of perhaps fifty-five, at Russian Bank. This she could play, and her old partner thoroughly enjoyed himself; he was justly proud of his game, he immensely admired young Mrs. Spaulding's handsome sister, and he liked to have the bridge players saunter over, when they were at leisure, to watch his intricate weaving and manœuvring.

Incredible—incredible—incredible! thought Hilary, as the bright hours slipped by. To-morrow night was the opera with the Wests, and on Friday the big charity affair at which she and Dora were listed to sell books or flowers or signed photographs. And that amazing talk in her bedroom was not a dream——

"Go play us something, Hilary!" Mrs. Carter Hungerford said at eleven o'clock.

"Oh, not to-night!"

"Oh, yes," said little Dora, putting an arm about Hilary, and pushing her gently along. Hilary was on the piano bench, had laid her white hands upon the keys, and Dora, so close that her white satin touched Hilary's black lace, had picked up her violin.

So they had been a thousand—ten thousand—times; Hilary's clean-cut harmonies carrying the high silver thread of melody that rose and fell from the Amati, Hilary's little sister looking keenly over her shoulder. To-night she felt, sitting so, that her heart would break with the burden that it carried. The one exquisite thing, the one rare thing of her life: her covenant with Dora's father and mother, her sacred promise to cherish and help the little sister—was broken.

Dora was no longer first; and Dora could stand here, smiling and beautiful, with the cruel knowledge of their secret between them.

"My Lord, what a picture!" Jesse Duer said, watching the two beautiful young heads in the soft lamplight, the blue-eyed brunette so grave, the brown-eyed blonde like a smiling little Dresden shepherdess.

"Aren't they wonderful?" Mrs. Carter Hungerford agreed.

"The feeling between them, Lizzie," said Craig's mother to the last speaker, "is the most extraordinary thing I ever saw. Butterfly turns to Hilary as if she were her mother, and I really think Hilary would die for her sister. Wouldn't you, Hilary?" she smiled, as the girl came up to them.

"I didn't hear you," Hilary said, in her faintly husky, pleasant voice, "but I have no doubt that I would—or wouldn't—whichever you decided!"

"When do you get into your new quarters, Grace?" Lizzie Hungerford asked.

"Next week, we hope. And this girl goes with me!" Mrs. Spaulding answered, an affectionate big square arm about Hilary. Hilary had a sudden feeling that

it would be a relief to leave Dora's house; she felt that many days of this surface sweetness and placidity between herself and Dora would suffocate her.

She was talking with Craig and his mother in the drawing room, half an hour later, and their guests had all gone, when Dora called to them all, from the doorway, a smiling and sleepy good-night. Hilary carried a heavy heart up to bed. No kiss from Butterfly, no real understanding. She was placed with all the others now, with Craig and his mother, outside the pale of Butterfly's heart, to be satisfied with that evasive smile and that significant silence.

It was several hours later, and she was exhausted, and perhaps somewhat relieved, with weeping, when she sank off into heavy sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KONRAD was at the opera the next night. It was during all the flutter and stir of the first entr'acte that Hilary heard a certain buzzing about her: "There, that's Konrad! The tall one, with the bushy black hair and the moustache!"

Hilary, who had taken Rose West's place with her husband, and with her fine-looking old father, for this occasion, because Rose wanted to go to a dance, was standing with Walter West in the almost emptied orchestra seats, talking animatedly with a dozen or more persons who were, like herself, surging about for the few minutes of relaxation. The entire great lighted floor of the immense building was filled with moving and scattering forms; women with their great furred wraps slipping from their bare shoulders, with jewels gleaming upon their hands and throat and hair.

In every box was a reception; Hilary nodded to Violet Vanderwort, in the Dwyer box; Violet's entire back was bared to the public gaze as its owner turned to talk to somebody behind her. The Manns were there, and the Duers and the Davenports; Hilary and the laughing women to whom she spoke usually began together: "Did you ever see anything like it? Everybody!"

She dared not look to see Konrad. The mere mention of his name made her feel giddy and cold. She

went on flirting charmingly with old Doctor Poett and the handsome Frenchwoman who had evidently come with the Cliff Overtons, but who was now deserted by them, and charmed to meet the young lady who had heard "Faust" at the Paris Grand Opera House when she was a child.

"Hilary, where's your coat?" Cy Dwyer said, making a hilarious progress toward her through aisles, groups, and seats. "You're getting to be a big girl now, dear, you can't run around with your little arms bare, as the littler ones do——"

"I like that!" Hilary said, richly amused, glancing down unruffled at her gown. "I take it you haven't seen Violet?"

"What?" he laughed delightedly. "What? *Bon soir, Madame; bon soir qui mali pense*, what? Hilary, I love your fan. 'It's my heart you-all are aimin' at, Tom!' as the girl says in 'The Heart of Maryland.'".

"It's Butterfly's, of course," Hilary said. "Poor little Butterfly, she's having a quiet time of it. But I believe she is coming to 'The Three Kings' next week; we play a lot of that music, and the Wendells are bringing her. How do you do?"

The last words, casually and sweetly spoken, caused Cy to glance involuntarily over his shoulder in the direction of Hilary's eyes. He saw Kronski, some twenty-five feet away, with a group of women, looking unusually handsome, serious and pale. Cy looked back; Hilary, who was, he decided, the handsomest woman in the house, continued to look about her half-smilingly while talking to the old surgeon and the Frenchwoman. She wore a black-and-silver gown Cy

had not seen before, and slowly moved the big, frail arc of her delicate lace fan. Cy noticed how superb her bearing was, she looked heroic, somehow, as her white breast rose and fell with some suddenly stirring thought; her shadowed eyes looked bluer than ever in the clear pallor of her face.

While he covertly watched her, perhaps appreciating without in the least realizing that a moment of acute emotion was here, she bowed toward an elderly woman with silver hair who was seated in the direction exactly opposite that in which Konrad stood, and said impulsively:

"There's Elise Taylor's adorable grandmother! Come with me, Cy, I must speak to her!"

Cy looked down at her approvingly, as they worked their way along.

"Do you know you're getting awfully pretty, Hilary?"

"Am I? I love to have you say so!"

"You know I've been half in love with Dora for years. Darned if I don't call it off, and land it all on you!" Cy said, handsomely. "Don't thank me, gal. I wouldn't do it if I didn't know you deserve it. Hello, Mrs. Post—you remember Cy Dwyer and Miss Collier? No, we're not engaged—yet. But I just mentioned our names together——"

"Oh, Cy, shut up!" Hilary smiled. But as she sat down in the seat next to the gratified old lady, she felt that she would like to sink on downward through the floor, and into the cool earth, and sleep there for ever.

Coming out of the opera house, when the last note had died away—for her old escort would not hear of

cutting one—she saw Konrad again. The lobby was a sea of circling forms; a cold swift rain had commenced to fall, sparkling through the wheeling lights of the street, the sidewalks shone black, and the dense crowds from the upper galleries opened umbrellas, locked arms, and headed courageously into the wind and wet.

Konrad was standing against a wall, with Von Mandescheid and several other men and women; Hilary had one look from his melancholy dark eyes. She felt that his look lingered upon her, even while she bundled herself up for the rush through the mêlée, and sprang into the limousine. This was Thursday; and it was only last Friday night, at just this time, that she had been so happy! They had been playing the Sarasate Dances—they had gone out on to that little balcony——

She shut her eyes, her head ringing with music, dazed with close air, and weary with thought. Last Friday seemed years away. She would never be that happy, radiant, excited, passionate woman again; the woman who had been in Kronski's arms, against whose mouth his furious kisses had burned so deep a scar!

Yet, she had seen him; there was relief in that. Their next meeting, however hard and awkward, would not be the first. He had seen her strong, smiling, surrounded by admiration and friendship, and her pride was helped by the thought. Never, never again should she betray herself even by the flicker of an eyelid, or the tone of her voice! The cup, as he had said, was a bitter one; but she had put it to her lips to-night.

By previous arrangement, she accompanied Mrs. Rodney Spaulding to the Charity Bazaar the next

afternoon. Craig's mother had done some of the hardest and heaviest of the work of preparation; Hilary had seen her walking magnificently about the big empty space of the Grand Central Palace before ever an inch of bunting or a plank of the booths had been put up. She had seen Mrs. Spaulding's florid face get redder, and her dark firm mouth more firm, and the widow's bonnet slip farther and farther over her beetling eyebrows.

Now all was beauty and excitement: Russian music, Russian dancers, booths of Armenian, Polish, Balkan wares; photographs, souvenirs, statistics everywhere of the great need and suffering across the world.

Hundreds of persons were drifting about; voices and feet sounded together; Hilary and her companion worked their way between great shining new motor-cars, looking incongruous enough here on this second floor, in their ribbons and rosettes, between palms and pillars, in a jumble of odours, colours, and noises.

Dora was already at their own booth, busy and happy and filled with importance, in a moving circle of other furred pretty women who were picking things up and putting them down again, scrabbling under the counters for string or lost lists, and making amateurish apologies for amateurishly wrapped parcels.

An interested public identified them, rightly or wrongly. That was the singer, that was the writer, that was the actress, and the saucy-looking lady in the enormous black hat was Mrs. Reggy Vanderwort.

The senior Mrs. Spaulding immediately assumed the management of her special group, and Hilary was as usual her aide. Young Mrs. Jeffries joined them.

"Fifteen minutes too late, Hilary! Kronski was here for a few minutes; I hadn't met him before. Dora took him about. I think he took ten chances on the Packard—fancy! But isn't he nice?"

"Very," Hilary said, the world turning suddenly dark. If Mrs. Spaulding had not delayed at the lunch-table——!

She glanced at Butterfly, who was evidently in glorious spirits, and her own sank—sank.

Louise Jeffries, junior, a gold-maned child in a brown coat and hat, and her smaller brother Timsy, were favourites of Hilary's, and they immediately attached themselves to her; Timsy frankly in hope of amusement, but the more diplomatic Louise with offers of help. They tangled strings, bumped into customers, mislaid small articles, and wept when their elders chanced to step on their feet or bump their elbows.

"Come!" Hilary commanded them suddenly, "we'll make the grand tour!"

"Oh, Hilary, don't let them bother you!" their mother said.

"I like it!" She really did like it. Children's company was always strangely soothing to Hilary, and with a confiding small glove in each hand she led them about for almost an hour. Their comments could not hurt her, they were blessedly uninterested in anything but themselves.

What did interest them surprised her. A young man painting show cards, in a retired corner behind packing-cases, held them in fascination. And Timsy remained rapt at a blank, deserted dusty window for some five

minutes, enthralled by a bird's-eye view of Park Avenue traffic.

They discovered treasure: a length of chain, a package of blank cards, three little empty screw-top wooden boxes in which bottles of cologne had been shipped; and over these they held grave consultations. Timsy lost his gloves and found them again, and Louise entertained for a few moments fears of a nose-bleed.

Hilary was sitting upon a packing case, carefully dividing between them the tablets from a package of silver-wrapped chocolate, and wondering how Louise could stand this sort of thing all day long, every day, when Konrad came up to her.

She had no warning. She stood up, smiling, and brushing the last silver foil from her hands.

"So, I find you!" he said.

"Were you looking for me?"

"I have been here before; did the Butterfly not tell you?"

"Oh, I knew that!" Hilary smiled. "But I did not know that you might come back!" She introduced the children, who bobbed him curtsies, and stood watching and smiling as Konrad conversed with them gravely.

"So I am not to be forgiven? We are not to be friends?" he said, straightening.

"Oh, friends always, I hope!" Hilary said, trembling, but looking straight at him from under the sweep of her black hat.

Konrad took her hand; he was close to her. They were fortunately in a quiet backwater, behind booths and packing cases, and so unobserved.

"My child," he said in a concerned voice, "are you so unhappy?"

"I—I am not happy!" Hilary stammered, her barriers falling.

"For yourself, or for the Butterfly?"

"For us both!"

"Hilary, will you believe that you have a friend who would die to make you happy again?" the man asked, after a silence.

Hilary flashed him a grateful smile, her lashes wet.

"Indeed I will believe that, Konrad!"

"And if I can do so, you will send for me from the ends of the earth to serve you?"

"My friend——" she faltered, with trembling lips.

"And you have forgiven me?"

"Ah, Konrad, it's myself I can't forgive!"

"But why?" he asked. "Did you think that you—you of all the world, could live without love? And are you ashamed that you love?"

Hilary, looking down into the congested street that had so fascinated, and that was still fascinating, Timsy and Louise, half-turned to give him a shaky smile over her shoulder.

"No, I am not sorry. I am not ashamed!" she said.

"I have a present for you," Konrad said, putting his hand into the breast pocket of his great-coat. "It was my mother's. I wish you to have it—my good little stepmother!"

Deeply stirred, and shaken with the first trembling beginning of happiness after anguish, Hilary unrolled the tissue-paper that wrapped it, and held in her palm an old-fashioned brooch: an oval of jet set with a pearl

and surrounded by tiny pearls and by a discoloured old gold filigree.

"She had no jewels, my mother," Konrad said. "But this she wore always in her plain gown. And this her son did not sell when it would have bought him bread! He gives it to his second mother."

The treasure that she thought it, her face, flooding with happy colour, betrayed; Hilary's blue eyes shone like stars as she thanked him. It amused him to see how tenderly she fastened the pin into her own sober dark blue velvet gown.

Their moment alone was over; Kronski being sought, was identified, was carried away to sign a photograph. Hilary returned the children to their mother with so transfigured a face that Louise Jeffries looked at her in surprise. And the rest of that afternoon, although Kronski almost immediately left the hall, and she did not see him again, was a time of deep and exquisite happiness to the girl. She had been missing him so cruelly, she had felt so alone and so unnecessary. Now at least she knew that he still liked her, that he had missed her, too, and that his old respect and affection were not touched by the episode of the balcony a week ago.

CHAPTER XXIX

She and Butterfly and Mrs. Spaulding drove home together at six o'clock. The frightful crowding and pushing and general excitement of the bazaar had wearied them all; but in Hilary's case it was a delicious weariness, a weariness that looked forward to an hour on the couch before the fire, with a book and with dreams. Dora, on the other hand, seemed restless and discontented.

"I think it's horrible," commented Dora, "all those women rushing and coasting about, and nobody managing anything, and people grabbing money and screaming and asking questions. Walt lost a perfectly stunning overcoat; he said the girl at the coat-room told him that she had only been there a few minutes, she didn't know who had had it when he checked the coat. Poor Walt went through hundreds of them piled up on the floor; he said it was a perfect *mess*, and this girl was laughing and talking with some young man all the time, and paid not the least attention!"

"Disgraceful!" Mrs. Spaulding said, frowning.

"And Cissy told me that at their booth little Mrs. Ransom sold two seventy-five-dollar hand-made négligées for seven dollars and a half apiece!" Hilary contributed.

"Louise found a little box on a chair, with about eighteen dollars in small silver, and a book and pencil,"

Dora added. "Imagine leaving it on a chair! It's simply disgusting! Shall you go back, Hilary?"

"I don't know. I might right after dinner, and wait until Mrs. Herbert comes—she said she'd be late. To-morrow night is really my night."

"I wouldn't go back if you paid me!" Dora yawned. "Craig isn't home, and I shall go to bed, with one of those new French books. Did you see Konrad?"

"Yes, just for a moment. I'd forgotten Craig was in Mount Holly," Hilary said, composedly. "He gets back to-morrow?"

"Or early on Sunday. We're all going down to the Thanksgiving party at Piping Rock on Sunday. I asked Konrad if he wouldn't come; he's taking those Russian doctors to the opera to-night; just a man's party. It's Godonoff, luckily. But he said he'd telephone in the morning."

Well, after all, it might be wonderful to be like Dora, Hilary reflected, sinking into her cushions a few minutes later, her street attire replaced by a wrapper, with her tired feet comfortably propped, and a tray of fragrant tea beside her. It might be wonderful to be so surface calm, so positive of one's ability to carry off any situation. Hilary had been shaken to the deeps of body and soul, made weak and despairing, by that little talk before this fire only a few evenings ago. But Dora had evidently felt that the storm would entirely blow over; and the storm had apparently done exactly that. Konrad and Hilary were friends, Dora and Konrad were perhaps something more, and life went on, with bazaars and motor-cars and tea-trays, in just its usual groove.

Presently Dora came in, in a loose silk robe, and Mrs. Spaulding came in, and was persuaded to share their tea. She did so somewhat uncompromisingly, sitting erect, with the strings of her widow's bonnet loosened and hanging. She was tired; almost nothing was said. Hilary felt that she could sit for ever, sunk into this downy comfort, with her feet upon a low stool; it was agony to pull herself up, bathe, and change, and set forth for the bazaar again at half-past seven.

The afternoon's confusion was augmented, if possible, under the bright night lights. Hilary felt achy and weary as she straightened the familiar counter, arranged her particular wares to look inviting, and murmured with other early arrivals. A dance was in progress in the very centre of the floor; the air grew hot and dusty and close; the incessant jazzing was an outrage to Hilary's trained ears. Feet shuffled, voices asked the same monotonous questions: How much is this, please? How much is this, please?

At half-past ten she slipped away, breathing in deep breaths of the fresh night air, and walking the seven or eight blocks to Dora's house over frozen, hard sidewalks upon which her quick step rang clearly. The Spaulding mansion seemed to be quieted for the night when she went in. Banks, on duty until midnight, admitted her with a sleepy bow.

"I think Madam's gone to bed, Miss. I believe Mrs. Craig went upstairs about ten minutes ago. Yes, Miss."

Hilary went to her room quietly. Dora was there, reading before the fire. She sprang up, her eyes glittering.

"Hilary!" she said, breathlessly, coming straight to her sister. "Tell me something: tell me the truth! Did you go to the opera with Konrad to-night?"

"Oh, Butterfly, this is horrible!" Hilary protested, sick at heart. "I've just come from the bazaar; I've not seen Konrad since this afternoon——"

"I thought you didn't see him then!" Dora exclaimed.

"Yes, I did, later. When I was going about with Louise's children. But, Dora, dearest, you mustn't—you mustn't let this thing come between us so! To meet me with a suspicious question like that——"

"Sis," Dora interrupted, unimpressed, "swear to me, *swear* to me that you haven't seen him since dinner!"

"No, I'll not swear," Hilary said, proudly.

She loosened her beautiful coat, carried it to her closet, and returned to the fire. Dora looked up at her with a placating smile.

"Hilary, I'm sorry. But I don't know myself in these days, I don't know what I'm doing half the time!"

"No," Hilary agreed, sadly, "I don't think you do!"

"That's—being in love, I suppose," Butterfly said, with a somewhat hesitating air. "What is it—where did you get it? From Craig's mother?" she broke off, suddenly diverted.

Hilary had dropped wearily upon the davenport beside her sister; now Dora's eyes had discovered the brooch. She bent toward it eagerly.

"Konrad gave me that this afternoon," Hilary admitted, simply, framing it with her white fingers and

looking down at it with a half-smile. "It was his mother's."

"*Konrad* did!" Dora had drawn back, her eyes were hard and bright, her breast rose stormily.

"This afternoon."

"He had taken it to the bazaar to give you?"

"I suppose so."

Dora was silent. Hilary looked up, and their eyes met in a long stare.

"What did he say?" Dora asked, in a whisper.

"Butterfly——" Hilary protested, mildly.

Dora flushed hotly, and bit her lip. Her eyes moved quickly and absently to and fro; she seemed meditating.

"That's it. You have taken him away from me," she said at last, in a hard, dry voice. "That's what has changed him—you've been doing it all this time. I never saw it! You knew what it meant to me, you knew I loved him—that didn't make any difference! Your promise to Father—your *promise* that you would take me to Kronski, to this very man—that was nothing. You've broken your word to us all—you've ruined my life!"

Hilary was amazed at the calm with which she could study the slender, shaking figure, the blazing brown eyes. Dora looked even smaller and younger than ever to-night in her plain little black crêpe gown.

"Butterfly, don't talk so! You don't mean it, dear. A girl of twenty-one, who has a good, devoted, splendid husband——"

"Now, *listen* to me, Hilary!" Dora said, in a fierce whisper, sitting for a moment beside Hilary, and clutching her sister's arm in fingers like a vise. "I am going

to fight for this—because it means either happiness, or that my life is over—that there is nothing left! You shan't tell him—you shan't tell him that dear little Butterfly is happy with Craig, and that Butterfly gets wild notions, but she is only a child—you shan't get him away from me that way! I'm not a child, I'm a woman, and I love him! Do you suppose that I am going to sit still? I'm beautiful, you've told me so. I have music and languages and youth—do you suppose that doesn't mean anything? He *did* love me—last April—do you think I was *fooling* myself?"

"He may love you, Dora, or you may be one of the many women who have flirtations with a celebrity," Hilary said, not unkindly, laying her hand upon her sister's. "I don't know, dear. I know that he gave me this."

Dora sprang to her feet.

"Oh——" she cried, suffocating. "Oh, you——" She flashed to the door. "I hate you!" she panted, and was gone.

Hilary, shaken and frightened, sat on, expecting at every moment that Dora would return, at least somewhat quieter, at least penitent over that last phrase. But the moments went by, and silence settled again in the disturbed air.

The little mantel clock struck the half-hour after eleven: showed a quarter to twelve. And still Hilary sat on, thinking with trouble and distress of Dora, but remembering, with a great joyful leap of her heart every minute or two, to glance at the old-fashioned pin on her breast.

There was a discreet rap at the door.

"Come in, my darling!" Hilary cried, going to meet it.

But it was not Dora; it was Banks, with a message.

"Mr. Spaulding telephoned, Miss. And he will be here at twelve o'clock, if you please. Or possibly a little later."

"Thank you, Banks," Hilary said, bewildered. "But —did he ask you to tell *me?*"

"No, Miss. But I thought you might wish to send word to Mrs. Craig, Miss."

"Send word to—— Isn't she in her room?"

"No, Miss." Banks was merely a mouthpiece for news. "She went out, Miss."

"Mrs. Craig——! Went out *now?*" Hilary's horror lifted her far above the thought of anything the man might say or feel. "Who—when——" she stammered.

"She went out at just half-past eleven, Miss. Emma went down to the door with her, and called a cab, I believe. I was in the pantry, and came out just as Emma was closing the door."

"Send Emma here!" But Hilary could not wait. She ran past Banks and into Butterfly's beautiful empty room. The maid turned, a young black figure, from before Butterfly's dressing-table.

She answered Hilary respectfully: "Yes'm," she said, "she was to be back immejedly. She didn't wish to disturb you—— "

"Did you hear the address she gave the taxi?" Hilary interrupted, harshly.

"I don't know as I remember it. He was to wait, and bring her back immejedly," Emma said, airily unconcerned.

"Why didn't you go with her!" Hilary said, frantic with fear.

"I wasn't dressed, Miss Collier," Emma answered, civilly. "I heard her rushing round and I come in, and she says 'Emma, you might jest as well go back to bed, I shan't need you!' But after she left, I thought I might as well wait for her."

"Was it Fifty-ninth Street, Emma?"

"I couldn't say, Miss Collier!"

"This is important," Hilary said, sternly. "Mr. Spaulding has just telephoned; he will be here in a few minutes. I *must* find Mrs. Spaulding——"

Emma's face paled; her eyes took on a look of fright.

"Mr. Spaulding!" she whispered.

"Exactly! And whatever Mrs. Spaulding's business is, I am sorry she went to-night," Hilary answered, briskly, regaining a certain casual air for Dora's protection. "Mr. Kronski is giving a party, and he goes away early to-morrow! Mrs. Spaulding probably wanted to join them for a few moments—but in any case I think I will follow her. What was the address?"

"It was somp'n Fifty-ninth Street," Emma admitted. She flew for Miss Collier's fur coat, ran downstairs beside Hilary to the door.

"Tell Mr. Spaulding that we are at Mr. Kronski's party, and that we will be back at once!" Hilary instructed Banks. She nervously refused to let him accompany her. "No, no, I can run to the Avenue, and get a bus if there isn't a cab," she assured him, "only—wait a moment! Did you tell Mrs. Rodney Spaulding that Mr. Craig was coming back?"

"No, Miss, I didn't rouse her!"

"Well, don't. I think we'll be back in twenty minutes. It's five minutes to twelve——"

She ran out into the darkness. Down the stone steps, about the corner——

She had only gotten so far when a taxi drew up at the Spaulding door. Hilary turned, ran back a few steps.

"Dora!" she exclaimed, thankfully. But a second later she shrank back against the wall; it was not Dora, but Craig, who jumped out, and stood paying the driver, his pleasant voice echoing in the silent street. Had he seen her? She fancied that he glanced more than once at the shadow in which she was hiding, and up at the door of the house behind him, as if something puzzled him. "God help us all!" she whispered, when he ran up the steps. It was the taxi he had just left into which she climbed a moment later.

To her frenzy of anxiety the machine seemed hardly to move. They bumped into the Avenue, bumped through the endless Forties, Fifty-third—Fifty-seventh.

"Here—this is it!" she cried, feverishly, out of the cab almost before it had stopped, and cramming a bill into the man's ice-crusted glove. Through the halls—up the big odorous stairs—her breath hurt her side, and her mouth was dry, she was praying as she ran. She reached the studio door, opened it, and walked in.

The immense room was but dimly lighted; there was only a dying fire. Near the one lamp Konrad was standing, in his dressing-gown, and before him, her hands upon his arms, her bare head thrown back, was Dora.

She turned, Konrad turned, at the sound of the clicking lock. Hilary closed the door behind her without removing her eyes from them, and came toward them.

"Butterfly, Craig has come home!" Hilary cried, trying to pierce the strange apathy that held Dora, who stood like a woman of ice.

Dora panted once. Her arms had dropped; now her eyes moved through almost closed lids from Konrad to Hilary.

"What if he has?" she asked, scornfully. "He must know now or later!"

"Come with me, Dora," Hilary pleaded, trembling. "Come home, now. We can talk about this tomorrow!"

"Very well," Dora responded, lifelessly. "You followed me up—I knew you would. I don't believe Craig's there; not that it matters. But it is as I told you, Konrad. Hilary doesn't approve of me any more, she doesn't love me. And I am never to see you alone again. She is better than I am, she is wiser and older—we all know that! Why shouldn't you like her better? Why shouldn't you forget," Dora persisted, recklessly, forcing herself on although her voice was breaking, "that I was just one of the hundreds of women, last spring, who were crazy about the celebrity! That's what she said. I suppose what *she* feels is something different! I told her it meant my life—I told her of the happiness, the lunches and talks you and I had in the spring! She doesn't care. No, because *she* is in love now, she is your secretary and your stepmother——"

"But let me understand! One moment——" Konrad said, in French, bewilderedly, looking from one to another. "You love, yes, Hilary. But it is not—my child, it could not be *me?*"

Hilary still panting, still wrapped in her heavy soft

furs, looked at him honestly for a long moment of silence. There was something of noble humility in her proudly held crown of braids and curve of her beautiful throat.

"I am afraid so, Konrad," she said, simply, at last.

Again there was an absolute silence in the studio. Far down in the dark street outside boys were calling an extra. But here the hush was so profound that the soft crash of a log, breaking into pink-and-gray ashes, could be distinctly heard.

Dora, who had turned at Hilary's entrance so that she and Konrad were alike facing her sister, had kept one hand upon the man's arm. Now she said, in a whisper:

"Konrad?"

Konrad moved his gaze from Hilary, looked at Butterfly; at her soft brown eyes and trembling young mouth, at the little black figure touched with lamplight in an aureole of bright hair.

"Konrad," she faltered, "I have told her. Will you also tell her that we are more than close friends?"

Konrad stood staring at one and then the other. His dark, colourless face wore an almost stern expression.

"You care for *me?*" he asked Hilary again. "Butterfly, yes, she is my friend, of course. I send her flowers, a book, we lunch together! But *you?*"

"I did not come to tell you so to-night, Konrad," Hilary said, bravely. "But it is true! I know, I know—" she added, talking against the sensation of being in an evil dream—"that you like us both——"

"But that will not do now!" Butterfly added, eagerly, as Hilary paused.

"No" Konrad agreed slowly, looking from one to the other. "That will not do—now."

There was an interruption; both girls turned pale, and Konrad held up his hand, listening, and silencing them. Feet were running up the stairway; Konrad had not time to get to the door when it was flung open.

"Craig!" Hilary whispered, sharply. Dora, ashen with fright, stood her ground bravely.

Craig, breathless from the climb, as they had all been, did not seem to see either Hilary or his wife. He went straight to Konrad; his handsome face pale and set, and his words gritted through set teeth.

"I demand an explanation, Kronski, of my wife's visit here at this hour," he said.

CHAPTER XXX

THEN for a long, dreadful moment there was absolute silence in the studio. Butterfly had turned, and shrunk up against Konrad; Hilary had moved swiftly, and had laid a restraining hand upon Craig's arm. The shaded lamp over the chair where Konrad had been reading burned softly and clearly; a tongue of flame caught at the end of a half-charred log, and burned up with a sudden sucking noise. But the men and women who stood facing each other did not speak; Hilary could hear Craig's violent breathing and her own terrified heart.

Presently Konrad moved, and, gently shaking Dora free, went to Craig, and laid his long fingers upon Craig's shoulder.

"No, my friend, no, my friend, I have done you no wrong," he said, mildly. Craig, looking into his serene but bewildered face, showed a change in his own face. Even against his will he felt himself somewhat reassured.

"Butterfly and I were just going back, Craig," Hilary said, in as casual a manner as she could muster. But Craig roughly pushed her aside, and addressed Butterfly, beyond her.

"Did Hilary come here with you?" he asked her, flatly.

"Why, of course, Craig!" Butterfly faltered, her eyes for one moment wavering toward Hilary's.

"We came here after the bazaar," Hilary began again. But Craig, whose usually handsome, dignified aspect was transfigured now by anger and suspicion, interrupted her dispassionately, without a glance toward her.

"You lie, Hilary," he said, quietly, with a sort of ugly triumph. "I saw a woman hiding against the wall of the house as I drove up. It was you. Don't try to shield your sister!"

"Ah, but, Craig, Craig!" Hilary cried, abandoning her ground. "Butterfly meant nothing. She's only a child——"

"She's child enough to come to a man's studio at midnight," Craig said, briefly. "She's child enough to be my wife, in the eyes of the whole world——"

"I came to the man I love—there! You might as well know it!" Butterfly cried, hysterically. "You and Hilary can follow me all you please, but you can't stop me! I'm sorry, I've cried myself sick about it—but that's the truth!"

She had turned again toward Konrad, and was clinging to his arm. He looked tall and dark and kindly bending over her.

"Yes, and I love you, too, my little friend Butterfly," he said, smiling, and in the soothing tone he might have used to an excited child. "But—but there is something else here that I do not understand!" And he put her gently aside, and went with three great steps to Hilary, taking her hands, and looking straight into her eyes with a troubled expression on his face, and with a quickened breath. "My child," he said, in a shaking voice, "will you tell me the truth of this?

May I speak now, before Butterfly, and before you all? Is it not true, what Mrs. Vanderwort has told me, that you love, and that—when he is free—you are to be the wife of—of the man you love?"

His glance at Craig, as he finished, was unmistakable. Hilary, stupefied with astonishment, could only follow his gaze, and return her bewildered look to his face.

"Of *Craig!*" she exclaimed. "Of Butterfly's *husband!* Konrad, who could have been mad enough to tell you that?"

"Mrs. Vanderwort!" Konrad repeated, simply.

"Vi Vanderwort!" Hilary's angry tone was shaken with a hint of nervous laughter. "I never heard such nonsense!"

"Then," Konrad asked her, eagerly, "then it is not true?"

"No," Hilary answered, in a silence, her blue eyes fixed honestly upon his. "No, it is not true."

"You knew I believed it?" he asked. "Why else should I write you as I did? You had been in my arms, you knew that I loved you! You did not answer me, you left my heart to break. And at the bazaar you said to me only 'I am unhappy!' Do you know what I did when you said 'I am unhappy!' I could not go with my friends to the opera, I could not eat, I walked alone in the night! And when I came in, to drink tea here, and to say to myself 'She is unhappy—she is unhappy!' then Butterfly came in."

"Be my friend," Hilary said, her brave laugh trembling into tears as she held out both her hands to him, "and then I shall not be unhappy again!"

"No," Konrad said, drawing near to her and looking deep into her eyes. "No, my dear girl, I shall not be your friend! There can be no friendship between you and me. I love you!"

Craig heard Hilary's voice break on what was not all a laugh nor quite a sob. Then Kronski's arms went about the rich, dark braids and the soft furs, and Hilary disappeared into them, one white hand showing against his dark collar, the curve of her cheek lost as he bent his dark head.

Craig turned, and took his wife downstairs. Dora would not let him touch her; she was sobbing violently in the dark. She crossed the sidewalk with a few flying steps, and flung herself into the waiting taxicab.

"Dora——" Craig began.

"Don't touch me! Don't speak to me!" she said, violently. "To-morrow I will leave your house. I never want to speak to you again!"

"Very well," Craig answered, coldly. He walked to meet the driver, who was emerging from the stairway where he had taken shelter; their footsteps rang hollowly in the dark, silent street, on the frozen sidewalk.

It was but some ten minutes in all before Hilary came down, Konrad with her. She got in beside Dora; Konrad, bareheaded in the windy dark, gravely bowed as they drove away. Nobody spoke.

The drive home was not long; it was taken in utter silence. When they reached the house Banks was waiting; Emma, curious and officious, in the background.

Dora went straight upstairs without a word. Hilary saw Craig turn into his library; she followed her

sister, and after some hesitation, when she herself was undressed, went into Dora's room to say good-night.

Butterfly was in bed, everything was dark, Emma was gone. Hilary did not offer to kiss her; she knew Butterfly. She stood fastening the little frogs of her oriental gown, anxious and at a loss.

"Good-night, dear."

"Good-night."

That was all. Hilary went into the hall again. Through Mrs. Spaulding's half-opened door a light was showing; the girl pushed it gently open, and went in. Craig's mother was sitting wide awake in bed, in a deep purple wadded jacket, with her grizzled hair in curl papers. In Mrs. Spaulding's youth all girls had worn chignons and crimps and bangs and follow-me-lads; she had continued to curl her hair through even her sensible middle-age, without ever considering it more of an artifice than washing her face.

She knew, of course, that something was wrong. Hilary sat on the foot of her bed, and told her everything. Mrs. Spaulding listened with a grim and grimmer face.

"This is the end for Craig and Butterfly, Hilary!" she said, at last, with a deep sigh.

"Butterfly didn't realize what she was doing!" Hilary protested, anxiously. "She's in bed now, and Craig's in the library. I was wondering—wondering—if I could talk to him. I understand Butterfly!"

"Better let me talk to him," his mother said, reaching for wrapper and slippers. "I understand *him!* Well, my dear, things turn out unexpectedly sometimes,

and you mustn't let this spoil your happiness! I believe you are a fortunate woman; he is a nice, simple, unspoiled fellow. This thing with Craig and Dora may blow over—I hope it will, and then we shall have time to rejoice with you!"

She padded downstairs, and Hilary, worried and weary, went to her own room. But the worry vanished, and the weariness mysteriously fled, the moment she was alone. Craig, even Butterfly, was nothing, in this great tide of amazement and incredulity and grateful happiness that overwhelmed her. She got into bed at last, and sat wakeful, electrified, hugging her knees—thinking, thinking, thinking.

Meanwhile, Craig's mother went into the library, to find him sunk into a chair, brooding. He got up and gave her a chair, his face dark with gloom.

"Craig, my dear, I am very sorry for this," Mrs. Spaulding said, reaching for a big silk bag on the table, and beginning to knit comfortably, as if the hour and the occasion were quite usual.

"Thank you, Mother."

"What do you suppose *possessed* the child to lose her head over Kronski, with all the rest of the young idiots!" Mrs. Spaulding observed, mildly, flinging her yarn free.

"I'm sorry, but I really can't discuss it, Mother," Craig said, bitterly and repressively.

"Knowing him," his mother pursued, thoughtfully, after a pause, "one can see exactly how his kindly, patient sort of friendliness would mislead her."

"I don't blame Kronski in the least!" Craig said, briefly, angry at himself for conceding even so much to her desire to talk it all over.

"No, neither do I. And I don't blame Butterfly much," Mrs. Spaulding said, purling busily.

Craig smoked on in resolute silence for perhaps a moment. Then he burst out suddenly, and against his will:

"Oh, no—perfectly natural! To rush to a man's rooms in the middle of the night, to ask him if he loves her!"

"That is really part of her simplicity, of her honesty," Mrs. Spaulding offered, seriously. "There's no artifice to Dora. It must be all or nothing. She got excited, got jealous—it was a child's act. Dora is not yet twenty-two. She did what the others did, poor child. These silly affairs are going on all the time in her crowd. Only she hadn't the experience to manage it. It's regrettable; it's disgusting, I think. I always have thought so. I'd as soon try to draw away a woman's children as her husband, myself. But I think you'll make a great mistake to pay too much attention to this, my dear. Especially as it's going to hurt Hilary bitterly—Kronski's in love with her. Dora'll sulk for a few days, and then come to her senses—her vanity is really all that was touched. Keep the surface smooth, Craig, and wait. In a few weeks, when we know what Hilary plans to do, then if you and Butterfly really can't make a success of it, there'll be plenty of time to decide!"

She replaced her knitting, rose to her feet, and patted his bowed shoulder. Craig did not move as she went slowly from the room. But when she reached the bottom of the big staircase he was suddenly behind her, and kissed her gratefully.

"Good-night, Mother, and thank you!"

"Good-night, dear. Don't sit up too late. Get your sleep."

"Yes, I will. Banks, put out the lights and lock up, will you?" Craig said, summoning the impassive butler. "I am going upstairs."

CHAPTER XXXI

HILARY awakened in a bath of sunlight, to find the clock at the incredible hour of ten. She had lain awake for a long time, in the night, before getting to sleep, her thoughts wavering to Butterfly and to Craig, sometimes, but always homing, with that new deep sense of amazement and joy, to Konrad. But sleep, coming at last, was the sweetest she had ever known.

Alice was moving softly about the room, and came to the bedside carrying a florist's box tied with shiny, narrow purple ribbons. Hilary smiled, sat up, and slipped her arms into a jacket.

"Is Mrs. Spaulding, Mrs. Craig, up yet, Alice?" she asked, pleasantly indifferent in tone.

"Emma said she had a headache," Alice answered, her appreciative eyes, and Hilary's, feasting upon the damp, fragrant violets as they were lifted from their silky layers of tissue-paper. The sweet, strong, delicious odour drifted through the room. Russian violets, and six words in French on Konrad's card. Hilary felt that the sun was suddenly brighter, and that the opening day trembled with ecstatic possibilities.

At half-past twelve o'clock she was to meet him for luncheon. She could barely touch her breakfast tray, excitement quivered in her veins, and life was centred upon the golden moment when she should walk into the

foyer of the big Fifty-ninth Street hotel, and see Konrad there, waiting for her.

Craig and his mother were lingering over a late breakfast when she went downstairs. He had fallen asleep at about five, he told her shamefacedly, and known nothing more until after nine.

Not knowing of their talk last night, it was amazing and marvellously relieving to her to have him get up and come to meet her with his usual shrewd, gray-eyed smile. He took her hands, and said in a brotherly, affectionate fashion:

"I didn't have a chance last night to tell you how heartily I wish you everything good in the world, my dearest girl!"

"Thank you, Craig," Hilary answered, taking his kiss with a sudden rush of colour. Her heart began to beat less fearfully; nothing agitating seemed scheduled for the immediate hour. "I stopped at Dora's room," she went on, saying the one thing she desired not to say, "but she was gone!"

"Dentist!" Mrs. Spaulding said, placidly, finishing her coffee. "Aren't you going to eat, child? Dear me, dear me, I'd forgotten that phase of it!"

"I had my tea. I'm lunching—at half-past twelve—at the Plaza," Hilary laughed, in a little confusion. "Not even fruit, please, Anna," she said to the interested and highly sympathetic maid.

"You and Konrad say the word, and we'll give you a dinner," Craig suggested. Hilary promised that it should be arranged; in great content, if in some astonishment. Last night's apparently incurable situation was being most smoothly handled; there were to be

no scenes, Craig was eating bacon and muffins, and Butterfly had gone to the dentist.

She had an errand, she said, excusing herself presently. It would be wonderful, thought Hilary, to walk to her midday meeting. The winter air brought up her colour, filled her lungs with energy, and lifted her heart on wings. She went briskly over the scraped sidewalks, in the cold, clear sunlight, her blue eyes shining with a new light, and a great bunch of violets pinned against her furs. The world was a wonderful world this morning!

But when she left the breakfast table, Craig said to his mother: "You're right; it would kill her to know how bad it is with Butterfly and me. Time enough later. She'd think she had to stand back of Butterfly—see her through."

"Does Butterfly understand that we are protecting Hilary?"

"She said very little. She was doing her hair; I sent Emma out. I loathe that girl! I suggested to her that we spare Hilary as much as we can: keep the surface smooth. It won't," said Craig, bitterly, "it won't be extremely different from what our relationship has been for several months. Dora got angry, for a minute, and said that her life was her own, and not Hilary's—she wanted to leave for California this afternoon. I talked her out of it. I think she sees that we've all got to sit tight until Hilary's married. Then she can go her way, and I mine. I'm not sorry, in a way. It hasn't been satisfactory, exactly, for a long time!"

"Kronski won't want to wait long," Mrs. Spaulding

said, after a thoughtful silence. "Small blame to him. I wish, my boy, I wish that when you had gone down to Mount Holly, three years ago——"

"I know!" Craig said, hurriedly. "I know!"

"Too late for that now!" Mrs. Spaulding presently observed. "This is November—Thursday's Thanksgiving. I've no doubt they'll be married by April."

"Until April, then," Craig agreed, briefly.

"Do you think Dora'll stand the strain?"

"I don't know. I don't think she does; she doesn't know what she wants. With Kronski and Hilary in Europe——"

"What I fear is her appealing to Hilary, and in some way upsetting everything. I shall be sick if Hilary's not to have her chance now!" the woman said, thoughtfully.

"We've all spoiled Dora," Craig commented, presently. "Poor Butterfly!"

"I, too," his mother added, vigorously. "I bought her everything she fancied, when we were all abroad. Your father spoiled her. And she was sweet with him, charming with him," his widow remembered suddenly, her stern gray eyes filling. "'Where's my little darter?'"

Craig remembered the phrase; the happy days of investigating, tramping, lunching, and shopping in enchanted Paris! Eighteen-year-old Dora looking at frocks, exclaiming and marvelling. Dora with the wedding-ring on her little hand, lingering on and on with her crackers and cheese and coffee, and enthralling him with glimpses of her pure soul and mind. What a wonderful fairy-like wife it had been that he took away

with him in his car from Mount Holly on a glowing September day! He remembered the little feet in trim brown stockings and pumps, the brown suit that she always so proudly called "my Gleason suit," the sheer frills about her soft throat, the dahlia hat upon her bright hair!

All over now. The tears that had pressed behind Hilary's brave blue eyes on that wedding day had been shed a thousand times since over that same radiant little bride; the little household in the Carolan kitchen, the love that bound these two sisters together in such iron chains, was all a thing of the past now. When Butterfly went to Paris again, it would be with some other man; the pretty face would be a little harder, the fair skin a little artificial, the laugh he had so loved would have the edge that Violet's laugh, and Cissy's laugh, and the laughs of so many other women, had nowadays!

And they had said, leaving Paris, that they would come back again, for a long stay! "With the children," Butterfly had demurely added, looking up at him as he stood beside her at the rail, with demure brown eyes under long dark lashes.

"You had no sleep, Craig?" his mother said, watching his dark face.

"Oh, yes, I did. I got off at about five, I think. But—but it isn't *sleep* I need!"

He got up, kissed her, and went with the soreness and slowness of an old man to get his coat and hat. His mother followed him anxiously. Craig again kissed her; he would be late to-day, but he would drop in at the bazaar sometime this evening. She was not to worry; everything was all right.

It was only to Hilary, however, that everything was all right, and that not for long. She had a few days, perhaps a week, of such delight as only comes once in a lifetime, and only to a nature as sweet and deep as hers.

To be with Konrad, in the joy of confessed love and utter confidence, was all her world just now. It was all wonderful to Hilary, his simplicities, his unexpected greatness, his ecstasy in every hour they had together. Whether he was troubled and nervous, for her to soothe and reassure, or whether his masculine bigness and confidence were waiting to carry away her last worry and scruple over some detail of their plans, their happiness was all one. They worked over concert programmes, they laughed and disputed at the piano, they walked miles, passing a hundred significantly smiling, friendly faces without seeing one, and Hilary added to her languages the first verbs and phrases of still another.

There were other hours; the hours that would have been supremely important to Dora, but that to Hilary and Konrad were mere interruptions of their delight. There were concerts, when Hilary sat in a box, watching him with anxious closeness, and receptions and dinners when she had to share him with the world. It amused them both to know that she bore this latter trial infinitely better than he did. Konrad was constantly worried when she was not within hearing; his eyes travelled through the most distinguished assemblages to find the superb young figure, the bronze braids, and the white shoulders. If she was at the piano, he must somehow begin to work toward her; he

would bend over her, absorbed, deeply resenting the presence of any innocent third person.

And if he could carry her off afterward, for a talk over some little restaurant table, or for tea with old Von Mandescheid and himself, in the studio, his black eyes would fill again and again as he told her how he had watched her—she had not looked at him at all—she had been enjoying herself too much—God, he would die, he would kill himself, if ever she ceased to care for him!

This association could not continue long without gaining the public attention. By Christmas-time several of the astute weeklies that are so glib with names and facts had hinted it strongly, and early in the New Year, Konrad, his face radiant with laughter and pleasure, was openly receiving congratulations, and the lovely Miss Collier, with her quaint braids and her demure velvet frocks and babyish collars, was the darling of the hour.

But before this time, unknown to the world, several important events had transpired in the old Spaulding house in Madison Avenue. It was only a few days after Thanksgiving that Hilary had noted with a sick heart that the apparent harmony between Dora and Craig was a mere empty shell, and that some change of deep importance was brewing.

Her quick sensitiveness where Dora was concerned supplied the solution. The breach had not been healed; would never be healed between Butterfly and her husband.

Craig was quiet, responsive, interested in what concerned his mother and Hilary. But toward Dora he never looked, and to Dora he never spoke beyond the

necessary civilities of the table or the drawing room. He was away often, in Mount Holly, and as the family was in mourning, it was easy for him to avoid society.

Hilary had been dreading, since that never-mentioned hideous night in the studio, the moment when Kronski and Dora must meet again. Konrad had made no allusion to the episode, indeed; women were so customarily infatuated with him, and he had been so amazed and stunned upon that occasion by the revelation of Violet's untruthfulness, and all it meant to him, that the probability of his fully grasping what Dora was implying in her excitement and incoherence seemed to Hilary more and more remote. Butterfly had had but a scant five minutes' conversation with him before Hilary's arrival; she had stammered out some jealous, breathless sentences, she had demanded his loyalty, she would have had time for no more, perhaps barely for that. Konrad's honest consternation at finding the sister of the woman he loved there in his room, at that hour, would further tend to make what Dora actually said the least important thing about her visit.

Still, there was something to forget, to overlook on his side, and what a world of shame and confusion on Butterfly's! Hilary felt the keenest apprehension regarding it, and she knew that the fear of it burned in Dora's heart. For a few days, she suspected that Butterfly was actually meditating flight; indeed, she knew her sister well enough to know that that escape would be her natural thought. But after a few brooding, apathetic days, Dora seemed settled into certain dreary grooves, and gave Hilary no further dark,

vague hints of a change, and of not being able to "stand it."

She and Konrad met quite simply in a department store just before Thanksgiving. Hilary and Konrad had been idling through the bright aisles of holiday wares, and Konrad had just bought her two hatpins of green stone, when they reached the glove counter, where Dora was seated.

She stood up, greeted the man with no sign of feeling except a sudden colour in her pale face, and showed Hilary the white gloves. The buttons, or the snaps? Buttons were in again. Hilary displayed the hatpins.

"Imagine, Butterfly, fifty cents apiece! The little scarabs, see? Aren't they cunning?"

"They're *charming*, Sis! I've a good mind to get some myself. Mother's madly trying to find something like a hundred little presents for the girls of the Workingwomen's Club. Don't you remember she was talking of it at breakfast? I could give every one of them these."

"Oh, do, Butterfly!" Hilary said, aloud, "there'll be such a jam in a few days!" In her heart she said, "You little thoroughbred, you!"

"But first I must congratulate Konrad upon winning the most wonderful wife in all the world," Butterfly said, giving him her little hand bravely, "I know what she is! There is nobody like her!"

"I shall try to be good to her," Konrad answered, simply, walking toward the jewellery counter, towering black and grave above little Dora. "See, here are the pins, and we shall find out exactly how many we may buy for the working ladies!" he added, gaily.

That was all. In another moment they were busily comparing blue scarabs with red, and the conversation was what it might have been a week ago. Butterfly sank into her usual quiet, in the motor, driving home, and made no comment upon the episode to Hilary.

In these days Dora was an altered being. She lived in a dark, sad world of her own, weeping often, sometimes raging and furious, but usually cold and self-contained. She rose late, dressed in sombre silence, saw her hairdresser and her manicure, went to her dentist, lunched at home with perhaps a languid conversation dying between her and Craig's mother, went out in the car at three, to wander listlessly through shops or look with darkened eyes at the bare parks, and came home to curl up over a book until dinner time.

She wanted no companionship; she sought none. Now and then Hilary persuaded her quite simply to attend a woman's lunch, or to slip in quietly to some matinee. Dora obeyed apathetically, her drooping little figure and toneless voice hurting Hilary every time her eyes fell upon her sister. Dora would smile gently at Cy Dwyer, take a hand at bridge, stare dully at someone who addressed her: "I'm sorry, Walt. I didn't hear you." When Craig wanted to go home, and Hilary was in a whirl of good-byes, Dora would creep quietly into her corner of the limousine, to sit there, silent, her chin in her palm, her eyes fixed upon the passing landscape, for the entire trip.

Her nights were restless, and even her splendid youth began to show the strain in faded colour and hitherto unknown physical ills. Her appetite was gone; she had headaches; she never got any sleep, she said. Hilary

felt her own heart breaking as she watched the sorrowful change that went on day after day, and saw, too, the pitiful effort Dora made to hide it from the eyes that had noted every trifling thing for good or ill that had ever touched her, her life long. She could not deceive Hilary, try though she would, and something of their old relationship crept back between them when little Butterfly turned in her shame and suffering to the sister she had wronged and misjudged for comfort.

There was one special day, in itself of no importance, but to Hilary almost unendurably sad and sweet. Craig was in Mount Holly, Konrad in Chicago. The sisters breakfasted together, and spent the whole morning talking of insignificant things and sewing in Butterfly's sunny room, lunched together, and afterward went to see Alice's mother, sick in Bellevue Hospital.

All day long Butterfly was her sweetest, a new quiet sweetness that Hilary found poignantly endearing and touching. At luncheon she obediently tried to manage her chop and spinach. Butterfly had had a touch of anemia, long ago, as a child, and Hilary was reminded to-day of the little obedient hand and the trusting brown eyes of the ten-year-old child. In the big, clean-smelling hospital, walking from sunny ward to ward, Butterfly had talked with the escorting nurse so pleasantly; she had laid her fingers so kindly upon Mrs. Kearney's hard, stained hand, and had bent her bright head to hear the hoarse, rasping voice.

And then she and Hilary had walked through unfamiliar streets, streets filled with bundled, red-faced babies with wet noses, and grimy, eager, capable little

girls with red hands, and had peeped into odd shops, and bought a pair of Hessian andirons for Mrs. Spaulding, who had a fancy for colonial oddities. The salesman had explained that the New England patriots had fancied their enemies in this form that they might spit upon them at pleasure, and Hilary had the delight of hearing Butterfly's old laugh ring out shakily among the dusty lamp-shades and dimly packed sideboards and bureaus.

If Craig could but see this new Butterfly! cried Hilary's loyal heart. But Craig never saw it. He returned from Mount Holly quiet, self-possessed, unapproachable as before, and Butterfly was her silent, nervous, ghostly little self again.

CHAPTER XXXII

One night, just after the strangely quiet Christmas holidays, Hilary and Mrs. Spaulding were before the library fire, with Craig at the near-by table, under the lamp, busy over some blueprints of the new Mount Holly packing room. Evergreen wreaths at the windows, and over the high doors, scented the room pleasantly; a drowsy fire crackled and was still, and the clocks ticked in a deep silence. Butterfly had just murmured a good-night, and had gone upstairs.

Suddenly, there was a hideous interruption. It began with the most disquieting of all sounds in a quiet house: the pressure of running feet. Then came several words in several voices, and then Alice's scream: "Oh, Mr. Spaulding—Mr. Spaulding!" and the thump of Banks's feet, as the butler ran upstairs.

"Get Mr. Spaulding!" came a hoarse voice that Hilary's paralyzed senses recognized as Butterfly's. By this time, after one second of terror in which any movement seemed impossible, they were all running up to Butterfly's room.

She was in her big Chinese wrapper, Alice was crying wildly and holding her; they could hear Banks rattling the hall telephone, they could hear his "There's been an accident at Mr. Spaulding's——If you please, Doctor, for God's sake, quickly!"

"Craig!" Butterfly whispered, with thick lips. Where

was her voice—what had changed her face to this ghastly mask of suffering?

They got her to her bed. She was trying to talk, but the voice was gone. Hilary, sick with terror, tore at counterpane and blankets.

"A mistake!" Butterfly whispered to Craig. "Believe me—believe me, Craig! I wouldn't—I wouldn't have done it! I wanted to sleep—that prescription Bertheau gave me——!"

She was writhing on her pillows; great drops shining on her white forehead, her soft hair sticking to the wet skin.

"Ah—that's better!" she whispered, suddenly easier; the dripping hand that had been pressing Hilary's with an iron grip suddenly somewhat relaxing. "Thank you!" she panted, to Craig, who had eased the little figure into pillows. "Too hot!" she breathed, struggling with the heavy robe.

Craig and Hilary stripped it from her, leaving her in the delicate little embroidered nightgown with its pink and blue ribbons. She clung to Craig's hand, her agonized eyes burning in deep purple shadows in her ashen face.

"A mistake!" she whispered again, "I wanted only to sleep. You believe me, dear—Sis, you believe your Butterfly! You're both—both so good to me—I've been —I've been so bitterly sorry! Oh--I can't—*bear* it!"

"Don't try to talk—it hurts your throat!" Craig directed, holding her tightly, as if to still the paroxysms that shook her like long shudders. "You took the disinfectant; in the same sort of bottle! Just keep quiet, Butterfly——"

"It's that horrible *inky* taste," she breathed, looking up at him childishly. "Water——"

Mrs. Spaulding gave her water, but she drank only a little.

"Oh, such pain!" she whispered, relaxed in Craig's arms. And suddenly her white face wrinkled, and she began to cry piteously, and raised his big hand to press it to her distorted lips. Hilary, holding her free hand and kneeling on the other side of the bed, burst into bitter tears, and laid her wet face against her sister's soft fingers.

Doctor Bertheau walked quietly and unannounced into the room, his nurse, a gray-haired woman, with him.

"Poison!" he said, briefly, in an undertone. "We'll see what we can do. I can ask this girl for everything," he said, glancing at the tearful Emma, "and I think you had better wait elsewhere. If you please, Miss Collier! You understand that we shall have to use radical treatment——"

Dora, who was drowsy, merely opened startled eyes when Craig laid her down; Hilary gave the doctor one imploring glance.

"Now, Mrs. Spaulding, we'll have to see just how much of a start this thing has gotten," the doctor said, kindly, taking Butterfly's hand. "Get me that bottle, Miss Butters," he added. One faintly frowning nod had the effect of taking Hilary, Craig, and his mother out into the hall.

How she lived through the next twenty minutes Hilary never knew. All thought was suspended. The familiar rooms, chairs, voices, seemed glaring and

strange. "Butterfly—dying," she said over and over again, in her heart. "Butterfly—dying." The words had no meaning. She sat in the padded seat of the great curved front window, with the hall lights twinkling upon her shining slipper, and slowly twisted and studied that slipper as if it possessed some rare interest. Craig, motionless, voiceless, stood with folded arms in the shadow of the big curtains. Mrs. Spaulding sat in a great carved English chair, her hands firm upon its arms, her eyes shut.

Twenty minutes. Then Doctor Bertheau stepped quietly out, and nodding gravely, beckoned them with his gold eye-glasses to a position farther down the big hallway. "Oh, my God—my God!" Hilary said, half aloud. Sick with apprehension, she and the others followed him.

"She is comfortable, much easier," said the doctor, putting his glasses carefully away. "The pain may return. In that case I would not recommend an opiate."

"Doctor," Hilary faltered, "will she suffer? Will it be long?"

"Oh, no," the doctor answered, comfortably. "Her throat may give her some little restlessness to-night. I would advise her staying in bed for a day or two——"

"In bed for a day or two!" Craig echoed, hoarsely, gripping his arm. "Is she—is she going to get *well?*"

The old man looked at him in amazement. His expression became apologetic.

"I supposed Miss Butters had come out to tell you," he said, concernedly. "I am sorry to have had you alarmed. No, Mrs. Spaulding took what she was supposed to take for wakefulness; but she took too

heavy a dose. In her nervous condition the effect of the drug was exactly opposite what it should be. We never use it in surgery for that reason; the patient's condition is too often a natural antidote. She felt her throat burned and became naturally frightened. There is an astringent effect, in some cases."

"Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" Craig heard Hilary whisper, and the next moment she was sobbing in his arms.

"Why, here, here, here!" Craig said, patting her shoulder, his own eyes watering, and his voice thick. "Don't, dear!"

"I can only warn you," the doctor said, smiling in a fatherly fashion, "that in Mrs. Spaulding's condition there will naturally be excitement, nervousness, a tendency to enlarge trifles, possible hysteria——"

Hilary's wet eyes and Craig's suddenly widened gray ones met his in one astonished question.

"You are of course aware, Craig," said old Bertheau, who had discussed this same question with Craig's father a generation ago, "you are of course aware that your wife is to become a mother?"

"Butterfly!" Hilary whispered, her blue eyes shining, a great hope awakening in her heart.

"I—no, I didn't know it," Craig said, awkwardly, clearing his throat. "My God! Poor Butterfly!"

"She may not have realized it herself; she suspected it, however," the doctor said. "However, there is no doubt of it. I should say early in June; possibly late in May."

"I—I congratulate you, my boy!" Craig's mother said, with a shaky smile.

"Butterfly!" Hilary whispered again, her awed eyes on space. "Might I—might I go in and see her?"

"By all means," Doctor Bertheau said. "She asked to see the prospective father here," he added, smiling. "Craig, she must be kept quiet. No excitement, no strain. Persuade her to lie in bed mornings, keep early hours, exercise. And get her out of town immediately afterward, into some quiet country place, you understand?"

"I understand," Craig answered, still dazed.

"Go in and see her!" Hilary urged him, with a guiding touch on his arm, her heart singing a wild pæan of gratitude and joy.

Craig went to the bedroom door, vanished inside, leaving the women to cry a little, and marvel and rejoice, beside his mother's fire, that it was not death that had come to the old house, but life.

Butterfly was alone, quiet and weary, her babyish head turned sideways in the pillows. She looked up at her husband with a new and timid smile.

"Did he tell you, Craig?" she whispered, laying a limp little hand upon his.

Craig sat down, put both his hands upon hers.

"Yes, he told me," he said, watching her anxiously. "Had you known it, Butterfly?"

"I guessed it. At first I hadn't any idea, and then—not so long ago, before Thanksgiving, I think, I suddenly knew. I wanted to kill myself at first—I don't mean that," Butterfly interrupted herself quickly, "I say that, but I never could even try, Craig. I'm too much of a coward, and besides, that doesn't solve anything. But now I'm glad, Craig," she resumed

presently in a tired voice. "Because I can give it—the baby—to you. I've given you so much trouble. I've been so stupid, all these years! And when I go out of your life I'll leave—my baby—to remind you that I wasn't all mean and selfish. It means being helpless, and sick, and in pain, of course," Butterfly ended, "but I like to think how much it'll mean to you and your mother; I know how you love children! I remember on the steamer how you played with the little English girls! I can't imagine now how I could—— But that doesn't matter. We can't go back now. It never would be the same."

"No, it never could be the same," Craig echoed, sadly. "I'm sorry for this, Butterfly. I'm sorry you're let in for the long business just when you want to be free. It's not fair. But we'll pull through it. And meanwhile, you must remember to rest, and not to worry, and to make yourself eat the right food. You might harm yourself now in a way you never could undo. We'll marry our Hilary off, and then I'll put you just where you like, under whatever conditions appeal to you. I don't think you'll want to give up your baby, my dear, when it comes. We have made a mistake; we must find the best solution we can. And now, will you try to go off to sleep?"

"Oh, I shall sleep!" Butterfly forced herself to say over the agony of brimming tears and a choking throat, and with a breaking heart. "Would you ask Hilary to come in? Thank you. Good-night!"

He gave her his kindly, concerned look, from the doorway, and she returned it with a smile. But when Hilary came in Butterfly was bathed in bitter tears.

It was only after a long half-hour of reasoning, pleading tenderness that she reduced the little sister to quiet again, bathed Butterfly's reddened eyes, and composed her to sleep.

Hilary sat beside her, watching her even breath that was broken even in her sleep by an occasional deep sigh, and presently she slipped to her knees beside the bed, and prayed once more for Butterfly the prayers that their mother was not there to share.

CHAPTER XXXIII

After that a somewhat changed life began in the old house, although without any special recognition on the part of the family that change there was. Dora was the centre about which all their plans revolved; never in the days of her arrogant youth and power had she been half so important as she was now in weakness, depression, and dependence. Every servant in the house knew why Mrs. Craig must be guarded and saved, and as the weeks slipped by the news reached the old family friends as well, and won for Craig's young wife the first spontaneous affection and interest his mother's circle had ever felt for her.

Dora was established on the big davenport in the library every afternoon at half-past four, and was the heart of the tea group that gathered there, large or small, between sunset and dark. Her own friends came in, from card-table or matinee; Kronski was often there, and Von Mandescheid, and what Cy Dwyer generally described as "Hilary's gang of nuts." Mrs. Spaulding's friends dropped in; it became the custom to look in upon little Mrs. Craig now and then, and hear some music, and all sorts of odds and ends of news.

The old mistress of the house had her own chair, and superintended the tea table; Hilary was always on hand, at the piano, coming in with a new arrival, or going to the doorway with some special guest.

Dora's day followed a regular routine now, and she looked the better for the quieter life. She spent the early morning in bed, walked for an hour before lunch, ate her broiled chicken and drank her milk with the docility of a quiet child, drove for an hour if the day was clear, and then slept until four. By tea-time she was always fresh and rested; it was for her the happiest hour of the day.

When the last guest was gone she stayed on, comfortable on her davenport, reading or dreaming, until Banks brought her her dinner tray, or until Craig gave her his arm and she joined them at the dinner table. And after dinner she came back to listen, to watch them all with her timid brown eyes, and to ask Hilary for this mazurka or that sonata.

For awhile Craig took no part in this little daily ceremonial of the tea hour; he was extremely busy, and was readily excused. But presently he began to come home a little earlier, and a little earlier, even more quiet and subdued than ever, but enjoying a talk with this old friend or that, and proud, in spite of himself, of his home and his own people. His mother, magnificent in her black silks, would be busy with the samovar; Hilary, always in her dark blue velvet, would be at the piano, with Konrad murmuring beside her; Banks would be moving solicitously about through the grouped figures, mellow lamplight and firelight over it all; and, beautiful in her pillows, with a new look of thoughtfulness and earnestness on her face, Butterfly would be enthroned by the fire: his wife, the mother of his child.

He need not talk to her; she made no demands on him. But she clung to her sister in these days as she

had never clung in her life; it was Hilary—Hilary—Hilary from morning until night. Butterfly was no longer capricious and exacting; where she had once fretted and complained, she now lay still. But her eyes followed Hilary about the room, and her face brightened magically when Hilary came freshly and breezily in, always with a tale to tell, always with a warm kiss and an embrace, always loving and interested.

Dora said little, but in a thousand ways she showed her sister that the lifelong devotion of sacrifice and service was bearing fruit at last. She listened to Hilary thirstily, she laughed a delicious low laugh at Hilary's recitals. She loved, when they chanced to be alone, to lie in the soft evening light, Hilary's hand in hers, and recall the old days.

"Hilary, do you remember the disgusting old alarm-clock that went off twice in the middle of the night? Do you remember the day I hulled strawberries all over the clean tablecloth? Don't you wish you could walk up the shell road, and into those woods behind Lovelands again, where the arbutus used to grow? And do you remember how many thousand times I made you sing 'Alan Water' when I was ill?"

These, and a thousand more half-smiling, half-sad memories tore at Hilary's heart. Her life had grown away from Butterfly's now; she was torn between the throbbing ecstasy of the new claim and the pathos of this little hurt, shadowed life that had for so many years been all her world. Ah, if Butterfly had needed her thus, had loved her thus, but one little year ago, a hundred Konrads could not have entrenched themselves

in her heart! Her prayer then had been that Butterfly would need her! But she was Konrad's now, and every day was deepening the tie between them.

She went from Butterfly to her meetings with him, haunted by a wretched sense of disloyalty to her sister. It seemed wrong to be so happy when Dora was so sad.

One day in early March she and Konrad were fellow-guests at a house party in the Alexandrowskis' little lodge in the Berkshires. It was so primitive a place that the activities of all six of the party were briskly engaged from morning until night to insure mere warmth and food in the cold early spring weather, yet Hilary and Kronski agreed, as they struggled with the stoves and the fireplaces, skimmed icy milk and scrubbed muddy vegetables, that they enjoyed one hour of this reality more than days of the heated and padded "roughing it" of the Dwyers' Catskill shooting-box, where they had spent the previous week-end.

In the frosted dooryard their breath smoked white in the clear, sunshiny air; there was no spring yet, no hint of spring to the average eye and ear. Yet Hilary knew the secret of the high fresh winds that blew so gloriously over the bare hills, and what the bare branches were plotting as they clicked together. The miracle of renewal was busy all over the world, and in her heart, and in Dora's very soul and body.

She laughed her rare, rich laughter in these three stolen days of holiday; the Alexandrowskis, Kasha, and a lean, iconoclastic admirer of Kasha, completed the party. There were no critical eyes; they could all be gay and foolish together. They could leave the dish-

pan to rush to the piano, and sit late about the lunch table humming themes from some obscure opera or concerto.

"See, for a moment," Konrad said on Sunday, when he and Hilary had returned from a walk to find the place deserted, "I have something to show you."

He took from his pocket a folded, thin paper, and Hilary leaned against him interestedly while he spread it on the table. It was the ever-thrilling, ever-enchanting diagram of a ship's accommodations.

"This is the *Olympic*," Konrad said, "here, you see, stairway—card-room—salon. And here, on Deck B ——" He ringed a room with his fountain pen. "Monsieur et Madame," he ended, triumphantly.

"Konrad!" Hilary breathed, excitedly. This was bringing the great event into closer range. "But what guilty splendour! That's an *immense* room——"

"She sails on April twentieth—a Tuesday," Konrad further volunteered. "We are at March sixth—good. When shall we be married? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow!" Hilary dismissed this as a joke. But she found that his expression was quite serious.

"My dear," she said, laying her hand upon his. "Let's talk sense!"

"But this is very good sense," protested Konrad. "The world knows that we are to be married—good. It knows that we go to the old country next month—good. Until we sail we have no peace, it will be the cursed telephone, the reporters, the questions on all sides."

"But couldn't we—couldn't we be married the day before and just slip away?"

"Then you are the young bride of the ship—you will not like that! The eyes of everybody are upon you."

He had read her aright. The quick blood came to her face at the mere thought, and the thought of that positive surrender. Her name, her life, her identity would be merged with his; and the fewer the watching eyes in those days of adjustment the better.

"Well, couldn't we say in two or three weeks——"

"When?" he asked, reasonably, taking a memorandum from his pocket. "I go to Boston next week, then to Philadelphia once more, to Baltimore, and to Chicago. These trips you shall make with me as my wife."

"We would escape all the fuss——" Hilary mused, rather struck with the plan. "We needn't think of invitations and clothes and lists and all the rest. Dora's in mourning, and not well, everyone knows that. To-morrow's Monday; you play at Carnegie Friday. How is Tuesday?"

"Tuesday, my darling."

"And then where do we go afterward, Konrad? Atlantic City?"

"Come," he said, his arm about her, and his face close to her own, "do you think that when I get my wife I shall not know how to take care of her? Do you think I shall take you to the *Café de l'Enfant* for your wedding dinner?"

She escaped from his kiss with a laugh, but her face was scarlet and her heart hammering as she set busily about supper preparations. This was Sunday. On Tuesday, to be Konrad's wife!

It was in the wakeful, excited hours of the night that she first suddenly remembered Butterfly. Down

fell the airy castle of dreams! She could not sail in six weeks; she could not desert Butterfly now, of all times in the world! Hilary tossed and fretted herself almost into a fever, mentally pacifying and pleasing them both, husband and sister, and came down to breakfast feeling tired and jaded.

The delicious odour of wood smoke was already fuming like incense in the kitchen; Vanni had started a fire. In a few minutes freshly boiled coffee scented the air, and Hilary opened the yard door to floods of sunshine that were actually warm, and to the pretty picture of barns and trees and fields steaming in air that was almost springlike. Grass was filming the hard earth with an emerald mist, and on the shrivelled grapevine outside the door the frost had already melted.

"Konrad, dear," Hilary said, bravely, over her coffee, when they were alone. "I must have been mad not to remind you last night that—that I can't sail so soon. You must see that I cannot leave Butterfly now, to get through—May—alone. It would break her heart!"

"Alone?" Konrad echoed, surprisedly. "I had not heard that the good Craig and his excellent mother were dead!"

"You know what I mean. This is a serious time, for several reasons. It's—it's vitally important that this event should bring Craig and Dora together. I believe it will, and his mother does. But I must be here to manage them all!"

"No," Konrad answered, inflexibly and calmly. "That is just what you shall not do. You manage too much. You have eaten, breathed, thought for poor

Butterfly long enough! I cannot permit it. It is much better that you shall worry for yourself, and for your own children!"

"Konrad, be reasonable. How *could* I leave her, just as—as she needs me most?"

There were tears in Hilary's eyes, and Konrad came to take the chair next to her, and put one arm about her, as he said, in the French that was so much more smooth and fluent than his English:

"My darling, do you not see that you are mistaken in this? While you are here to mother her, to spoil her, she will not need her husband! But when you are gone, across the ocean, happy without her, sending her letters, and little Swedish shining boots for the small one, and a cap from Norway for herself—will she not turn to her good husband? She loves him, you know that. She must make him see it. How can she do so if it is into your arms that the child is laid, and if your kiss is the first kiss, if it is 'Sis—Sis—Sis' upon whom she calls? You have given her so much joy and companionship; now you must give her a little suffering, a little loneliness. To a woman, her own man must always come first—this is their child, not yours. In good time——"

"Oh, hush!" she breathed, half-crying and half-laughing, her fingers upon his mouth. And for a long time she rested quietly against his shoulder, while the strengthening sunshine crept into the big, bare, half-furnished dining room, and robbed the fire of its light. "Konrad," she said finally, in a dreamy voice, and without moving, "sometimes I am almost afraid that you are clever!"

"Not clever; cleverness is for women," said Konrad, simply. "But I would be wise, for you. To-day and to-morrow I am a bachelor. But on Tuesday I shall have my wife to care for!"

For a wonderful hour they murmured of their plans or were peacefully silent; Hilary's blue eyes were content, she felt wrapped in happiness, deep and satisfying and sweet. She spoke no more of Butterfly; indeed, there was no room for Butterfly in her heart. She was clinging to the last bright hours of girlhood, dreaming of her gentle, fading mother, her tired, discouraged, courageous father, remembering days that seemed to belong to another life, so long ago they were, and longing, as all good daughters must long, for that father and mother to share with her now the happiest hour of the life they had given her.

There were other thoughts, too, thoughts as humanly simple as the man's heart and the woman's that beat so closely together. Hilary's mind went to her bureau, her wardrobe, she saw herself packing the new blue velvet gown that she had never worn. She took down from its shelf a spring hat gallant with cock-feathers. She hesitated over the old suitcase; perhaps she would buy a new one? There were linens soft with embroidery; presents that Butterfly had made her, still in their tissue-paper; there were the frilled blouses that went so smartly with the October suit.

"But shoes, I must have at least two pairs!" she reminded herself suddenly, half-aloud.

"What did you say, my heart?" Konrad asked, rousing.

"I was thinking of clothes!" Hilary told him, burst-

ing into sudden delicious laughter. When Etelka and Kasha came downstairs five minutes later, the former protested at finding her guests prosaically busy over the dish-pan. To the piano with them—was there no romance in their souls? But to Hilary and Konrad every breath they drew was of glorious romance.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Upon their return to the city the next day Dora entered into their plans with generous zest; and Hilary found herself in a world of surprises and thrills. The sisters shopped busily on Monday, Butterfly protesting radiantly that she was not tired, that it was doing her good! Hilary's room was a maze of packages when they got home. It was Craig who took her, late on her wedding-eve, to select the most splendid of suitcases, and on the actual day of the wedding she and Kronski bought the plain little gold ring, and scurried about in his car frantically attending to last details.

"The idea is not to give oneself time to think, apparently," Hilary told him. "Butterfly asks me if I am nervous, and Mrs. Spaulding—but oh, look!" The name of Craig's mother reminded her. "Look!" she said, displaying the great tasselled rope of seed-pearls that somehow suited her simple and dignified beauty so well. "And silver, Konrad—her mother's! Not Craig's father's spoons and things: Dora has crates of those. But the Kidder silver, the heaviest I ever saw! And Konrad, the Dwyers——"

There was no end to it. There was no time to do more than exclaim and exult before four o'clock had come; and somehow Hilary was in the frill and the October suit, and had pinned on the groom's gift of violets. The new pumps shone with a liquid splendour,

the big furs were ready to be seized, beside the gold-monogrammed case, and Hilary's blue eyes shone darkly under the sweep of cock-plumes.

"Absolutely quiet, because of the recent death of Mr. Spaulding's father, and attended only by the members of the immediate family!" Hilary quoted from the notice that would go to the morning papers, to Butterfly. "What do you suppose a wedding that *isn't* quiet is?"

"Our wedding was sweet," Butterfly said, wistfully, curled in a big chair, and watching Emma and Alice, and the cousins from Hollywood, and Craig's mother, joyously busy about the bride. Tears came to her eyes when Hilary knelt before her for the last kiss before going downstairs. "Oh, Sis, I love you so!" she faltered, clinging with sudden terror to Hilary. "Don't—don't ever stop loving me, will you? I feel as if I were losing you!"

"No tears, little girl," Craig said, coming in to take his wife down. It was not much of an endearment, but it was more than Butterfly had heard from him in many weeks. She looked up at him gratefully, her wet eyes smiling, and as he put his arm about her, Hilary, watching them, said in her heart that Konrad was right.

Craig came back for her; they went downstairs together. Hilary's face was serious, but she sent Dora a little smile when she came into the drawing room, and through the brief ceremony she and Konrad were hand-in-hand.

It was not much after five o'clock that they came quickly down the street steps together; there was a

crowd on the sidewalks, importunate reporters, a moving-picture machine. They flashed through them, Craig was holding open the door of the car, and Konrad's driver had his instructions. Hilary gave Craig a last kiss, waved her hand; Konrad sprang in beside her. They were gone.

The March air felt cool to Craig as he went bareheaded back into the house, and the rooms seemed big and dark and empty. The wedding party was still in the drawing room. Rose leaves had fallen on the old rugs, and between the palms and Easter lilies, where Hilary had stood, there was a space that looked wide and empty. Banks was still passing coffee and salad; Dora was back in her pillows. Over the big, warmly lighted room there hung a certain air of flatness, of collapse.

The cousins, departing, said over and over again that he had won a charming wife, and that she was a fortunate girl, too. It seemed only yesterday that she was going about Mount Holly, so pretty and so sweet! They had always thought her interesting, out of the common.

"Yes, but they never thought her interesting enough or out of the common enough to invite us to dinner, or send us a pair of gloves!" Dora said, without venom, when they had departed. Craig laughed out shortly, and Cy Dwyer, who was a guest at the wedding merely because of the fortunate chance that had brought him to call upon Dora at four o'clock, said wonderingly:

"Somehow I can't see you wanting gloves, Butterfly! It must have been quite no end rotten, what?"

"No," Dora responded, dreamily "It wasn't so

bad. I—I had Hilary. I suppose I used to row when she made me practise and do verbs. But they don't seem so terrible now!"

Craig sent her a quick glance, unnoted. This was a new point of view for Butterfly.

"You must keep up your music while she's away this summer, Dora," he reminded her. Dora's sad little face brightened at his tone, but with the attempt to reply came tears, and she stopped speaking, and looked at the fire through bright arrows and stars.

"Butterfly, if you feel this way about Hilary, I hate to think what it'll mean to you when some rough girl gets me!" Cy said, sympathetically.

"If you'll only stay round sensible girls, Cy, you needn't be afraid of ever getting married!" Dora answered, laughing shakily.

"Dear one, with that, I'm off!" Cy said. "Mrs. Spaulding, may I give you my arm to your motor, and fall all over you going down the steps?"

"Thank you, Cy," Mrs. Spaulding was beginning when Butterfly put an eager hand upon the older woman's arm, and said in alarm:

"Oh, Mother, please! You're going to stay with us to-night, please! We'll have supper early, and play three-handed bridge—Craig has the scores, haven't you, Craig?"

"Dear child, I can't. I believe I will, Dora," Craig's mother said, one phrase as definite as the next. She suddenly stooped to kiss Dora as she spoke. Craig, sunk into a deep chair, and watching his wife's fair head touch his mother's gray one, thought it was charming to see how close the two women had grown to be

Dora was the least demonstrative of persons, and his mother notorious for her aloofness, yet here they were, solacing and soothing each other in a house that seemed suddenly blank and forlorn without Hilary.

She had been away for a night or two often before this. But there was a difference in the feeling that she would not come in, to evoke flights of glorious chords from the piano, to look up animated and argumentative from her tea-cup, to sit in the twilight murmuring and chuckling and exclaiming in undertones with Dora. The bronze head and the blue velvet frocks were gone for ever.

"Don't you feel—don't you feel as if someone were dead?" Dora asked, when Cy was long gone, and they three sat on tired and quiet.

"I feel as if I was!" Craig answered, smiling. "Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do, ladies. We're all full of messy salads and sandwiches; we won't dine until nine o'clock. Meanwhile, get into your big coats, and I'll take you to a loge at the Rivoli. There's a delightful picture there, I understand——"

"Good boy!" approved his mother, who had a fondness for the screen. Dora's face brightened with pleasure. Hilary was gone; but there were still happy things to do.

"Six o'clock!" she said, thoughtfully. "I wonder where they are now?"

"Fifty miles away at least!" Craig opined, giving her his arm.

CHAPTER XXXV

But Hilary and Konrad were not more than half a mile away, after all. They had driven up the Avenue for only a few moments, had whisked through the foyer of an old hotel, and had been safe, since half-past five o'clock, in the quiet and warmth and restfulness of the lofty, elegant old rooms that had sheltered many and many a bride. The great windows of the suite looked down at the Avenue three stories below; an opal twilight lingered above the big stone buildings; omnibuses moved through a golden haze that ended far down toward the square.

The usual thousands were coming and going; motors honked and scuttled; women in bright spring headgear gathered at the crossings or lingered at the windows where hats and gowns were displayed. Hilary, standing in the window embrasure, with Konrad's arm about her, saw many a little office-worker hurrying along, and wondered why one of them should have been singled out for the occupancy of this lofty room of pale peacock and cream hangings, this stately old carpet in faded scrolls, this softness, sweetness, beauty. Above the old mantel was a long mirror, and before it were bowls of violets; there were roses on the piano, and more violets in the room beyond, where she had put away the cock-plumed hat.

She had feared this hour, girl-fashion, but she feared

no longer. It was too beautiful, too quiet, and too filled with content. It had made her heart beat fast, an hour ago, when Konrad's big coat with its fur collar was hung beside her furs in her deep closet; but she had reminded herself sensibly that in a few days it would seem as natural to her to have this tall, black-headed man in her room, as to have Dora. Meanwhile, she felt the deep relief of being only second in command. The responsibilities of life had been hers so long; it was delicious to think of his having planned this, ordered the flowers, the dinner, the glowing coal fire, to have him as proud as a boy that nothing had gone amiss! Last night, lying wakeful, she had fancied that she would be rattling somewhere in a train to-night; she had imagined him picking some place for their trip that would mean the usual fatigues, cinders, dirt, heat, and chill.

"I can hardly believe it," she told him. "I imagined myself staggering into some cold hotel at about eight, dirty and tired from some trip, being stared at—because you look like a celebrity, you know, even if people don't know just who you are!—walking through halls, and dressing for dinner! This is so different, and so wonderful——"

"To-morrow we will have our trip, our two-days' trip!" he promised her. He sat at the piano, never his familiar instrument, but his to-night because he was so anxious to do something extraordinary for her, and Hilary, moved by something of the same indefinable feeling, took up his violin. And as with infinite effort and many mistakes they played this reversed duet, she was reminded of other lovers: of Dante's drawing and

of Raphael's sonnet. There was new music there: they were soon deep in it.

She had changed to the new blue velvet, with the preposterously beautiful cuffs and collar that Mrs. Spaulding had selected from her own laces. Thus they had played together in the very beginning, the first night in Mount Holly; thus they had played last autumn, when Hilary was only conscious of liking him, of wanting to be his friend, his protector. And thus they had played a hundred times in the past few months, at Dora's piano, at Etelka's, at Kronski's own.

But there was no audience now; and under their music throbbed the passion of this exquisite hour when they were trembling on the brink of the new life. She was his wife, this superb woman with the keenly cut mouth and the shining blue eyes; and high above the city they both loved, away from it, yet in its very heart, they had come to their wonderful hour.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THIS was on Tuesday night, and it was on the Friday following that Banks demurely announced to Dora and her mother-in-law at their luncheon, "Madame Kronska." Radiant, Hilary came in, close upon the announcement of her name. Butterfly was in her arms, and they laughed a little shakily at their own emotion at being together again.

"I have exactly twenty-five minutes," Hilary announced, looking at her wrist-watch. "When did we get in? This morning. We went to the studio, Von Mandescheid was there, and we all had a late breakfast together. Konrad plays at Carnegie this afternoon, and I came to kidnap my Butterfly. You are invited to my box, Mrs. Spaulding. I am *nouvelle arrivée*, but I am not a snob."

"Late, perhaps," Mrs. Spaulding said, after thought. "I'm full of a thousand affairs, and you rush off and get married—it's very annoying!"

"It's very wonderful," Hilary assured her, with a sort of gravely smiling dignity. "I have to remind myself that there is nothing phenomenal about it. Every week has its weddings, and every week has its women discovering, as I am, what exquisite joy it is to have companionship, devotion—someone who cares that you like tea for breakfast, and who worries if you aren't in promptly for lunch! I've thought of you and

Craig a hundred times, Butterfly, and what a baby you were when you went off from Mount Holly!"

"Too much of a baby!" Dora said, thoughtfully, an hour later, when they were in the darkness of the box, and in the hush of the crowded house the orchestra was about to begin.

"What did you say, my darling?"

"I was thinking of what you said at luncheon, Sis. I was too much of a baby when I was married. I didn't have the right sense of proportion. Silly things counted with me, and the great things somehow—slipped by me."

Hilary's face was grave as she leaned on the back of her sister's chair. Butterfly was her loveliest to-day, in a new gown of softly spreading black silk; her fair hair was framed in a great velvet hat. She had loosened her big fur coat; her exquisite skin and her red lips were the only relieving touch of colour in the shadowy whole except for the great cluster of gardenias pinned against the rich seal of her collar.

Here and there in the big house some especially sharp eyes had identified the violinist's young wife; Hilary had flushed happily as she acknowledged one smiling bow of greeting after another. The real battery of eyes and glances would come after the concerto, she knew, when Konrad intended to join them, and when Craig and his mother might come in. Meanwhile, she had experienced just enough of Konrad's new claim upon time and liberty to find this hour alone with Dora a delight not to be wasted.

"Butterfly," she asked, very low, "you don't mean that you think your marriage was a mistake?"

"Oh, yes, I do!" Butterfly answered, quickly. "Any marriage that I made would have been a mistake!"

"But why do you say that, dear?" Hilary asked, distressed.

"Because marriage is a business, Hilary. And I didn't know my business," Dora answered, after a pause.

"All life is a business," Hilary offered, doubtfully, as Dora was still.

"Yes, my dear, and some people never learn it!" Butterfly added, bitterly. "And some, like myself," she went on, in a musing voice, "learn it too late!"

Nothing more was said until the symphony which was the first number was ended. Then Hilary leaned again upon Dora's chair, and went on, in a loving and protesting voice:

"Too late, Butterfly! When you are not yet twenty-three?"

"There is a sort of bloom about being married, Sis," Dora said, with a new wisdom that surprised Hilary, even through the heartache of listening to the sorrowful little listless voice. "You have it now—some people don't ever lose it. They lose something, I suppose, but the charm is never broken, there has never been a breach, a time of readjustment. They go from the pleasantness of being engaged to married love, and then —I suppose, other love, love like Craig's mother for his father. She doesn't cry, and scream and faint, and all that, but one part of her life just ended when he died. He *was* her life.

"I was too young," Butterfly began again, as Hilary found nothing to say. "I look back at our early days

—it was all presents and parties, going all the time, being admired—it was so new to me! When that quieted down I had nothing to give Craig. I hadn't thought much about what he *was;* it was more what he *had*. Sis, it isn't only me! That's what has wrecked Vi's marriage and so many others. There was nothing else, nothing back of the novelty and excitement. I danced and smoked and gambled and drank—it doesn't sound decent, but it's what we all did! I remember being with Katharine Templeton once, on a house-party up in the Adirondacks, and it occurred to me that in one week she broke every one of the Commandments —every *one*, even 'thou shalt not kill'—if you call race suicide murder! God—and taking His name in vain, and keeping His day holy—what a joke! Coveting your neighbour's goods, and your neighbour's wife, bearing false witness, even stealing, for Katharine does cheat at bridge, and everyone knows it, if she *is* worth seven million, and right in the very heart of society! Her Patricia is coming out next winter—one can't help wondering what worse things the *next* crowd will do!

"Well, of course, Sis, Craig had grown up with these people; he didn't take them seriously. I did. I wanted to go them one better, to get into the very inner ring. Jimmy Madson and I led a white baa-lamb right up the Avenue one day; and I went to the Fishers' ball as a beauty-parlour; it seems so silly now, when I had so much, when I only had to be decent and dignified to have everything worth while!"

"Butterfly, but if you have found it out, even late, isn't it all right now?" Hilary said, tenderly.

"No, because I've broken the charm—brushed away

the bloom," Dora answered, seriously. "Burned my wings!" she added, whimsically. "Butterflies don't get new wings, you know!"

"Perhaps they go back into the chrysalis sometimes, and come out lovelier than ever?" Hilary suggested.

"Ah, Sis, how sweet you are. You would like to have it that way, I think," Butterfly said, with an April smile. "No, I can't go back. I can't make Craig forget what a giddy, frantic little fool I've been. If I had stopped short of that last piece of insanity—but I didn't. He doesn't believe me now. He hardly listens to me. He's kind, and if—if I should be ill for months, if I should lose my baby, he'd always take care of me, he'd never reproach me. I don't think he'll even remind me of what I said—that I wanted to leave him, that I was going away. You—you don't know how good he is. He seems like one of the others, just a handsome man who plays bridge and golf, and wears correct clothes, and knows about the operas and plays and books—but he's good with it all. He's *just*. I've hurt him; I've disillusioned him once and for all. And that first love—the love I had on that wonderful trip to Europe, and when we first came home—that'll never come back!"

Hilary was impressed. She had never heard Butterfly talk in quite this strain before; she thought back, over three bewildering days of revelations and adjustments, and wondered if the flaming ecstasy that bound Konrad and herself together would ever be succeeded by a different love. Even now, she knew that it would. She remembered the sober, hard, self-denying years that her parents had known, that had

bound her to them and to Dora, and she knew that joy is not the greatest gift of life. Some day Konrad might see her weary, discouraged, agonizing over a delicate child, with a gray thread here and there in her heavy braids, with a back that could not so magnificently stand the strain of three hours—four hours—at the piano. Some day she might see him less of a favourite, bewildered and depressed, aging—her heart closed over the thought in a spasm of love and jealousy! Oh, to be his wife, his comforter, his companion then, when all the world forgot or ignored him; to have him beside her then, when he belonged no longer to his public, but to his home, and his children, and to her!

"Sis," Butterfly asked, in the silence, "do you suppose it could come back? Do you suppose that what Craig first loved in me he might love again?"

"You mean that you've never stopped loving him, Butterfly?" Hilary asked, with a great hope flooding her heart.

"I mean that I never really loved him, Craig himself, until these last few months," Dora answered, slowly, feeling for words. "Just for what he is, apart from the money and the position, and what he can give me. I'm—*dying* for him, Hilary!" Dora's eyes brimmed with tears, and her lips shook. "I watch him—his mouth, and his gray eyes, and Hilary—he is good to everyone but me," Butterfly faltered, her voice breaking. "He smiles at his mother; he adores you. I see him at dinners, talking away to the women next to him. But when he turns to me there's a change—a cloud, or a film, I don't know what to call it! He looks old, and patient and tired, whenever he speaks to me. I—Sis,

I feel sometimes as if I couldn't bear it! I feel that I am going to die when my baby comes, or to grieve myself to death afterward, as my mother did! When I see our old pictures on the steamer, or in Paris, or those Southampton pictures—I can't look at them! Sh-sh!" she ended, warningly, as Mrs. Spaulding began to fumble in the darkness at the back of the box. A moment later the black-enveloped and veiled form settled itself on a chair with a hoarse whisper of reassurance. Dora did not turn, her face was not visible in the gloom. As for Hilary, she heard nothing, knew nothing, saw nothing except that the figure of a tall man with black hair was making its way between the orchestra chairs, and that the house was beginning the generous applause that always greeted Kronski.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"Tell me about it!" Butterfly commanded, cheerfully.

She flung out her arm to give a basket-chair beside her an inviting touch, and Craig took it thankfully. One of April's treacherously hot and enervating days had fallen upon the city; the long morning hours had passed in shining glory over the unprepared restaurants and theatres and shops, suddenly lowered awnings had been unfurled like an army with banners, to meet the glare, and open motor-cars waited outside the hotels.

Dora was on a second-story porch at the southwestern side of the old mansion, a porch where several potted ferns and a miniature feathery bamboo shared the wicker chairs under a gay awning. Below her was the privacy of her own and a few other conservative old backyards, where collies tramped and yawned, and where a baby-carriage or two sometimes moved before a uniformed nurse; and in these stood some magnificent trees, whose little damp first foliage had wilted into limpness to-day in the first strong heat.

"What a day to sail!" she said, with a sort of joyous envy. "But tell me, tell me all about it!"

"You were wise not to attempt it—it's an awful day!" Craig assured her, surprised and marvellously heartened by her philosophic gaiety. He could not know that Hilary, smothering her sister with a kiss some three

hours before, had said, in final guidance: "Now remember, my darling, just how merry and enthusiastic and interested you used to be with Craig four years ago, and pretend that he is that same strange young man that you couldn't believe was really going to fall in love with you!"

"But, Sis," Butterfly had stammered, clinging tight to the fragrant and radiant vision that was Hilary, "how can I? I'm losing you, now when I've just found you, when I know how dearly I love you!"

"You can never lose me now, Butterfly," Hilary had answered, tenderly. "You lost me infinitely more when you married, because the love was all on my side then."

"Ah, but if I could go back, Hilary, and just have some of those days with you all over again!"

"We can't go back, Butterfly," Hilary had said. "But sometimes I think the future is only a repetition of the past. Konrad and I will come rushing in, in September, and somebody will get his darling soft little face kissed off by his Aunt Hilary, and in two minutes you won't know that we ever went away! And then, perhaps—well, let's suppose that Craig is desperately ill. *Then* you'll say to me, 'Ah, if I could only go back to April, when you and Konrad left us, before the baby came, if I could only show Craig how I love him, how happy I was to be just alone with him then!"

"I see what you mean," Dora had said, with an awakening face. And now, at one o'clock, she was lying, a vision in her laces and ribbons, with a luncheon table beside her, awaiting Craig's arrival, and with the most serene and affectionate of smiles to greet him.

Craig looked his appreciation of the delicate handkerchief linen robe that showed Butterfly's white-clad feet and the embroidery of foamy underpetticoats. In the loose frills at her breast were lavender and lemon ribbons; Butterfly's heavy hair was pushed back in a rich mass from her rather pale face, and her brown eyes looked big and childish in faint circles of shadow.

"You were wise not to attempt it, my dear; there was a mob sailing, and all sorts of bumps and delays even getting to the ship!" Craig said. "Mother and I got there about eleven; the boat was half an hour late sailing —Konrad was there, in wild spirits, and of course Hilary was superb. I must tell you about the high spirits. You know I went up to the studio at nine this morning, to bring Hilary here to see you, and to arrange some little business matter for him; we have the same broker, and Konrad wanted to give me a check for him. He went in to the phonograph people a few days ago, to get his semi-annual check, and he had his income tax on his mind—it was a mere formality, but I said I'd attend to it all. Well, I got there at nine, the trunks were gone, of course, Hilary was opening letters and drinking coffee with her hat on, and her big Chinese coat over her suit-skirt, that sort of thing—old Von Mandescheid was having a spasm in one corner with the storage man, and Konrad had just come out, and was sitting opposite Hilary. His check from the phonograph people had come—it was over ten thousand dollars. He began to talk business to me. Just then—as luck would have it!—he got a long letter from a compatriot in Europe, a touch, of course: children starving, pictures of refugees, a half million women and children will starve to

death unless America hurries—you know the sort of thing?"

"I know," Dora said, nodding. "Your mother sent five hundred only a few weeks ago, and didn't we send something?"

"Exactly. Well, Kronski went crazy. He tore his hair; he wouldn't drink his coffee, he walked the floor. His people were starving, and he was getting checks of this size, he was talking of investments, of income tax, while children looked for bread, and bread did not come! God—God—he had known what hunger was, he had known what it was only to wish warmth, food, and he was sailing for Europe with his bride——"

"I know how it is," Butterfly smiled, shaking her head. "Poor Hilary! But she likes it, she understands him."

"Understands him! Listen. He came to her side, knelt down, buried his head in her lap, and groaned. Suddenly he seized the check. 'My darling,' he said, 'here is bread! How much may I send to these little ones?' Hilary put her arm about his neck. 'Why, send it all, dear, of course,' she said, calmly. 'We don't need it. Send it just as it is!'"

"I thought you said they were going to invest it, pay their income tax out of it, Craig?" Dora asked, with a faint frown.

"They *were!* But what of that? Konrad burst into tears; he almost smothered Hilary. 'She says to send it all!' he sobbed, 'that is my wife!' The tears were running down his face, you never saw such a scene. He pressed the check into my hands. 'You will send it all that the children may eat!' he shouted. Hilary laughed

and cried, we all did. 'And suppose my London concert is a failure?' he asked her—you know he thinks every concert is going to be a failure!—'Then there will be no money for gowns, no money for a motor-car, to show you my country!' Hilary said: 'Be sensible, dear. Then I shall cook for you, and you shall take your fiddle, and we will wander through the countryside, giving concerts as we go!'"

"And she would do it, too!" Dora said, her eyes shining. "But, Craig, surely, surely Konrad has lots of money?" she asked, faintly apprehensive.

"He's making it hand over fist, of course. But if he's going to hand it out like this——"

"I don't think it's right," Dora said, after thought. "They ought to think of their children!"

"Well, it seems to me they should—drink your milk, Butterfly," Craig said, mildly, by this time in the full enjoyment of his luncheon.

"Because you know they'll have a pack of them," Butterfly went on, with smiling eyes on space. It was delicious to agree with Craig, to have him approve of her point of view, even as opposed to Hilary's. "Did many people see them off?" she rseumed.

"Well, quite a few. Hilary looked gorgeous, and Konrad, as I said, was like a boy. Hilary was jabbering English, French, and Italian with the weirdest-looking crew of geniuses I ever saw. Kronski has Kostia, of course. Mother told Hilary that she ought to have a maid, and Hilary said she would have got one, but she was afraid that she couldn't suit a maid. But she did say that she might pick up a middle-aged Frenchwoman—'one of my cousins, maybe,' she said.

She's the most extraordinary woman; she can say that sort of thing to any one, and get away with it. Cy Dwyer was there, pretended to faint away on the wharf, and called out: 'Captain, that's Helen's child, my long search is over!' He was really awfully funny. And Vi was there, seeing that Italian Count who's been here, and vamping a young Englishman. It was broiling hot; they were still loading luggage, and everything was in a mess! I tell you, we're going to have summer, after all. It was sweet, driving back; the whole city seems to smell of flowers! Well, we'll miss the dear old girl, won't we?"

"You love her, don't you, Craig?" Dora asked, wistfully.

"I should suppose everyone loved her. I don't know what it is, exactly," Craig answered, "but she is a marvellous woman. I looked at her to-day, and thought of her, plugging along in Uncle John's office, helping you, teaching herself the Lord only knows how and when, working steadily ahead from one point to another! And she's not stopped yet."

"Think what *I* can remember!" Dora said. "The little grimy kitchen, and the saucepans all stuck with rice, and the sheets that got so thin—I can remember the very shape of the darns! And I remember her having a sore throat once, and how frightened she looked when she said to me, 'I *can't* be ill!' I was blundering about, burning things, and bringing her luke-warm tea, and grumbling, I suppose! And through it all Hilary kept saying, 'Imagine how this will seem to us when we're in Europe, Butterfly! Won't this walking home in wet shoes seem like a joke then!'"

"Astonishing!" Craig said, looking thoughtful and then laughing. "But this is the really unusual part of Hilary," he added, after a pause. "It isn't that she's happy *now;* she has something to make her happy now. She's married to a big man with whom she's madly in love; she'll have plenty of money and travel and excitement for the rest of her life. But it's this: she—she seems not——"

"She seems not to need it," Butterfly supplied, eagerly, as he paused. "That's Sis, exactly! She's *always* been happy, always bustling about full of schemes; she really isn't any different now from what she was in Mount Holly! All she wants is someone to love, and someone to work for—she's said so a thousand times. I really think she'd be just as happy settling with Konrad into a Bronx flat."

"Wait until the babies begin to come along," Craig said. "Then she'll be less casual, you'll see! We have the start of them, Butterfly."

"Yes, I know," Butterfly said. "If—if——" Her voice thickened; she stopped speaking. "If I come out of it, Craig!" she faltered, in a low tone.

He looked at her in concern.

"Dora, don't you feel well? Bertheau said that you were in splendid shape, that you could do anything now, within reason. You know he told me that you would get depressed, that it was quite natural——"

"Yes, I know!" Dora said, quickly, and was still. She lay back quietly in her pillows and closed her eyes. They had finished their luncheon now, and the table was gone.

Craig sat on, idle and relaxed. He did not really

think as he smoked; he had a lazy vision of Hilary at the steamer rail, her blue eyes looking back across the opalescent great circle of the ocean toward the vanishing silhouette of the city that held her Butterfly. He dreamed of her return in the autumn, of the pleasure it would be to watch for a cable, to say, "Hilary and Konrad will be here on Wednesday." And would there really—Craig mused—would there really be a splendid little rosy baby asleep in his old nursery then, to be brought down dewy, and in ruffly white, as other men's babies were, to be introduced to the kinspeople from over the sea? His heart warmed to the little creature; it was an extraordinarily thrilling business, this question of a baby, considering how common a human experience it was.

He supposed Dora was asleep, she lay so still. There was something strangely pleasant in this unusual hour: Dora resting under her awnings in the warm spring day, and himself sitting beside her, thinking about their child. Craig felt a sudden pang of compunction as he looked at her; it ought to be simple enough for a man of his type to keep a temperamental, eager child, half village-bred and yet with all the romance of the old world in her veins, from making foolish mistakes. It ought to be simple enough to keep her happy! She was so young, so fresh and sweet, in her transparant linen and coloured ribbons!

He reached gently for her hand, and held it in his. Not for many months had he felt so drawn to her, so marvellously content in mind and heart. His wife, his child, his home, he said to himself—that was the sum of human possessions, after all.

Suddenly Dora opened her eyes, and to his amazement he saw that they were brimming, although she tried to smile.

"I shall get through it, Craig," she said, going on with their conversation as if there had been no interruption, "if you want me to!"

"Dora!" Craig said, shocked and concerned. Somehow he was on his knees beside her chair, and she had laid her childish arm, with its delicate laces falling back from the warm skin, about his neck, her brown eyes wistful and childishly wide.

"If you want me—if you love me—if there need be no more talk of m-m-my going away from you!" stammered Dora, in tears. "I want you, Craig. I want to go down to Southampton, where we were so happy, with you and the baby, and never think again of—of horrible things, and never talk again as if—as if you weren't my husband, *for ever*, and as if I weren't your wife! But—but if you are angry at me, Craig, for all my mistakes and stupidities, then—then I *can't* get through it, I shall die!"

"My darling," Craig said, deeply stirred, "do you think I haven't made mistakes—and been stupid?"

Dora tried to laugh, touching with her soft little finger the tear that was travelling down his cheeks. But the effort was not a success, her lips trembled, and in the relief of being in his arms again after the long hungry months, she buried her face in his neck, and cried as if she would never stop.

"Why, Butterfly—Butterfly!" Craig said, drying her eyes gently, and then his own. "You mustn't cry, my darling. What would Hilary do to me, if she knew

that before she was three hours out I had you in tears?"

"Ah, but these tears do me good, Craig," Dora answered, raising her face, and smiling, and in her old strong, confident voice, "and I'm not going to talk any more! Elise is coming to take me driving, and your mother and a lot more will be in later. I'm not going to talk any more," she repeated, seriously, still clinging tightly to his hand, "I've talked too much. But by the time Hilary comes home, Craig, you and I are going to be the happiest husband and wife in the world. Will you believe it? And believe that some day you are going to love me just as much as you did when we were first married?"

"Butterfly, I don't know," Craig said, kissing her. "Because never in my life have I loved you as I do this minute!"

She looked at him incredulously, cried a little, laughed a little, and then rested in his arms, the radiant colour that had been so long absent from her face flooding it again. He felt her small, boneless fingers twisting his ring, as she had so often twisted it years ago in such a happy hour.

"What are you thinking about, Butterfly?"

"This—" she said, smiling dreamily—"our being friends again—everything being so right again. I was wondering if this isn't the greatest thing Sis ever did for me, after all. To leave me even when I thought I couldn't get along without her, Craig, to leave me alone, to find out how much I needed you!"

THE END